

THE LUCK OF THE DUDLEY GRAHAMS



ALICE CALHOUN HAINES



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A story of family life for boys and girls between nine and sixteen years. How the family were poor and kept a boarding-house ; how they lost their boarders, and were poorer still ; how Ernie, the little sister, persisted in looking for the lost "Dump-Cart contract," which would mean so many good things if only it could be found ; and whether in the end she found it. There were funny things that happened, too ; and these are also told.



ELIZABETH

THE LUCK OF THE DUDLEY GRAHAMS

*AS RELATED IN EXTRACTS FROM
ELIZABETH GRAHAM'S DIARY*

BY
ALICE CALHOUN HAINES

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRANCIS DAY
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To My Mother

Thy heart will read what others do not see;
Therefore, dear heart, this book is most for thee.

THE LUCK OF THE DUDLEY GRAHAMS

NEW YORK, Wednesday, November 26.

WE are the Dudley Grahams,—four children and a mother. We are very poor and keep a boarding-house; not because we like boarders, but because when dear father died a three thousand dollar life assurance and this house were our only “available assets,” as Uncle George, who was executor, explained: “and so you must take boarders.” We do; but it isn’t always pleasant.

The three thousand dollars did not last long, either; for there were a great many debts to be met that nobody had known anything about, and we had to have the library repapered and a new carpet in the hall, to impress the people who came to look for rooms. “We must be very polite and

charming, too," said Ernie, "and talk as hard as we can all the time, and then perhaps they won't notice how shabby the rest of the things are."

But I fancy they did; because it was over two months before we could get anybody to stop with us, and the money in the bank grew less and less, while Uncle George grew more grim and disapproving, and said that dear father had been "criminally careless," and that no man should be permitted to have a family, if he did not know enough to provide for it. But, at last, Miss Brown came; and then Mrs. Hudson and the Hancocks, and now we are really beginning to get along.

Father was Uncle George's only brother. He was an inventor, and a true genius; but, unfortunately, nobody ever discovered this, except just us. He knew all about air-currents, the contractile bladders of fish, and the flight of birds. There is a great, ghostly, flying-machine in the workshop in the attic with dusty yellow sails,

and a really wonderful motor. Haze, who sleeps in the workshop since he was obliged to give up his room to the boarders, often dreams that he is taking trips at night. He says the dreams are quite horrible, and calls them "nightmares"; but if only dear father had lived to perfect the machine, we are sure it would have been a success. And that would have been so pleasant, for father never had any successes, except just once,—which we did not profit by, as I will tell later.

Haze is my chum. He is fifteen, and I am seventeen; but sometimes we feel a hundred, because there are so many things to worry about. Dearest mother never worries. She is too Irish for that;—all she cares for, she says, is that her children shall be happy, and good, and clever, and have everything they want. Somehow she seems to believe that we are what she wishes us to be, too,—so that one would feel ashamed to appear discontented. But, oh, if you love your family the way I do, it is hard, hard, hard to be poor!

However, to return to our *mutton*,—in this instance Haze,—his real name is John Hazard, though he is never called John or Jack, only Hazard, or Haze, or Hazey, especially the last two, because they fit so well. For, though he is very clever and half through High School already, he is not a bit practical, never sees what goes on about him, and is always forgetting things. He does not care about athletics, either. He hasn't the build, he says (his legs being too thin), nor the time nor the money. He is in his Junior year this term, the youngest in his class, and at present he is cramming like mad, so that he can take the final examinations next fall, and "begin to help the family." That means giving up college, his fondest dream. It is mighty noble of Hazey; but, I must confess, not at all becoming. His face seems to grow smaller day by day, and his eyes, behind his goggly glasses, bigger. Dear Haze! he doesn't even have time to talk to me any more, and that is why I thought of starting a

diary. My cousin Meta has kept one for over a year,—a dainty little volume with gold clasps and a red morocco binding. This is just an ugly old account book of father's that I found in the workshop. The first few pages are full of the most amazing aërial computations; but there is plenty of room left for writing,—and one must have somebody to confide in!

After Hazard comes Ernestine. She is twelve, and is frequently called Ernie,—which name suits her just as well as Haze's names do him; for she is really more of a boy than a girl, we think, despite her charming blue eyes and rose-leaf complexion. Ernie is very, very pretty, has sweet ways and a really lovely disposition; but, for all this, she is rather a trying child, for she is continually getting into scrapes, tearing her frocks, breaking the furniture, etc.,—and she always means so well that it is hard to scold her.

Geof is Ernestine's chum, just as Hazard is

mine. He is Uncle George's son, but so much more like a brother than a cousin that I am going to describe him here. He is fourteen years old, and the direct opposite of Haze in nearly every way. He is a handsome fellow, big for his age, and rather sullen sometimes. That, I think, is because he is not happier at home. He goes to a fashionable school, plays football and hockey, and is perfectly hopeless in his studies. Uncle George maintains he *could* do better if he would. Aunt Adelaide, who is Geoffrey's stepmother, says it is a case of "inherent stupidity." Mother thinks neither is right, and that there is something radically wrong with the school methods. Altogether it is not pleasant for Geof, who wants to give up studying and go into business. This enrages Hazard.

"A fellow with *your* chances!" he says.

"I'd swap them for yours," answers Geof, who is not brilliant at an argument. And Haze snorts derisively.

After Ernie comes Robin; he is six, and our baby. He has never been strong, because when he was a tiny mite of a thing a careless nurse dropped him and injured his hip. He has bright, dark eyes, and you can always tell when he is coming by the little hopping sound he makes with his crutch. It reminds one of a bird, so his name suits him, too. I love Robin better than anything in the world; and I am never going to marry, so that I can stay with him and take care of him always. But this is a secret.

And that (including mother, whom one can't describe because she is too wonderful) is all there are of us, except the kitten, which is black and is named Rosebud, and the cook, who is also black and is named Rose. Of course, we did not name the kitten after the cook. It just happened that way.

As to Uncle George's family,—whom we call the George Grahams,—they are very wealthy, and have a beautiful house, and horses, and plenty

of servants. But we would not change with them. No, indeed!

When Uncle George comes to visit us of a Sunday morning, as he sometimes does to see how we are getting on, he is sure to stand in the middle of our shabby back parlour, and puff out his cheeks, and throw out his chest and say,—

“I don’t pretend to be a man of genius like your father. I went into business at fifteen years of age. I’ve pegged away a good forty years since then, and I guess I’ve managed to get pretty much what I want out of the world. Talent don’t pay, sir. No, sir; it’s common sense that pays.”

Aunt Adelaide, who is Uncle George’s second wife, is handsome and fashionable. She was a widow with one daughter when Uncle George married her. So you see that Meta is really no relation to either Geof or ourselves. She is six months older than I, and she and Geof do not get along so very well. She thinks him stupid because he does not like the things she likes, and he

thinks her silly and affected. I am afraid she sometimes is.

Georgie is both Meta and Geof's half-brother. He is a little younger than our Robin. He has very rosy cheeks, and beautiful clothes, and expensive toys. Once when he was sick for two weeks with German measles a trained nurse was engaged, and he had chicken broth and oranges every day. Sometimes I hate Georgie!—which is wicked.

Uncle George is devoted to his family, after his own fashion, and does not spare any expense where they are concerned; though he, himself, dresses plainly and never gives anything in charity. He says he does not believe in it, that no one ever gave anything to him.

One day when he was standing in the middle of our parlour with his cheeks puffed out as usual, Robin, who had been sitting in the window turning the pages of an animal picture-book, looked up.

“Did you ever wish you were a camel, Uncle George?” he asked.

“No; I can’t say I ever did,” answered Uncle George, condescendingly. “Why should I, now?”

“It would be so much easier for you to get into heaven,” chirped Robin. And, after a minute, when Uncle George had thought it over and began to understand, he laughed and really felt rather flattered. Dear father was so different!

I said I would tell about his one success, and how we did not profit by it as we should. It was a great pity, because most of the problems father worked on had no market value at all;—he was too brilliant to find it easy to consider commercial interests. But this was different,—something quite sellable and practical,—a mechanical attachment for dump-carts! However father came to think of it, he admitted that he did not know. He quite despised it, and was really rather

ashamed even to explain the way it worked. But he made up his mind that for once a little money would be nice; so he took the model to Uncle George and asked for a loan. But Uncle George's own affairs were rather involved just at that time, and besides he said he did not care for investments of such a nature. He never had much faith in father.

After that father was introduced to Mr. Perry, a lawyer and promoter, and a partnership was arranged between them by which father was to receive \$500 down, and in one year's time five per cent. of whatever income the invention continued to realize. The contract was drawn up, for father read it aloud to us one day at the lunch table.

"I'll go around to Perry's this afternoon," he said, "and get this thing settled and off my mind." We were all quite excited, for it was a long time since we had had anything to spend. I remember we sat in the window-seat in the din-

ing-room and planned our winter clothes—Haze, Ernie, and I—for nearly two hours.

However, we none of us saw father when he came home. He went directly to his workshop, and about ten minutes later, as Rose was passing the door she thought she heard him call. So she peeped in, and saw him standing supporting himself with one hand on the table.

He tried to speak, but could only groan, and the next instant he fell to the floor. Dear father! it all seems like yesterday, now that I write it. Rose gave the alarm. Somehow we got him downstairs and into bed; but he did not recognise any of us, and the next morning at three o'clock he died.

Dr. Porter said the attack was brought on by worry and brain fatigue. It seems so sad, just on the eve of his first success! For nearly all the carts one meets throughout the city nowadays dump in father's way, though the patent bears Mr. Perry's name.

And we never found the contract! Mr. Perry says he knows nothing about it, and that he never signed any. He has his brother as witness to a verbal agreement entered into that same afternoon in his office by which father sold the model outright for five hundred dollars, which was paid to him the same date by check.

It is true that Mr. Perry paid father. We found the check in his waistcoat pocket; but it was only on account, we feel sure. Without the contract, however, we can prove nothing and are quite helpless.

Could father have lost it, or left it anywhere that afternoon? Even a little income would be very nice,—for then perhaps we would not have to take boarders.

There is Mrs. Hudson's bell! She has rung twice. Rose won't answer it. I must fly!

Saturday, November 29.

BLUE! blue! blue! oh dear, I do feel blue, and so does every one else, even the kitten! In the first place the house is cold. We have not been able to get the dining-room above 58° at any time to-day, and the boarders appear to believe that we keep it at that cosey temperature out of pure spite and malevolence.

“My friend Mrs. *Bo-gardus* considers it a stupid form of suicide to economise coal in *such* weather,” Mrs. Hudson remarked this morning. We had not been economising, but nevertheless we felt crushed; for whenever Mrs. Hudson has a criticism to make it comes under cover of the same potent Name,—perhaps I don’t spell it quite correctly, but *so* it is invariably pronounced. None of us have ever met Mrs. *Bo-gardus*, none of us ever expect to meet her,—she is a sort of cousin to the famous “Mrs. Harris,” we are sometimes tempted to believe,—but it is through her reported remarks that we are given the coveted, if

immensely overestimated, advantage of "seeing ourselves as others see us."

This morning's none too flattering vision resulted in Haze being sent down to shake up the furnace;—which did not prevent Miss Brown from wearing her pink knitted shawl all day, and sniffing, and rubbing the red tip of her nose. Just why these artless actions should have enraged me I don't know; but, somehow, they did.

As Ernie once sagely remarked,—“However innocent a boarder's habits, they are bound to be unpleasing.”

Then, too, I broke a string of my mandolin, and I have not five cents in the world with which to buy another. It is almost amusing to be as poor as that. Also, Haze is growing cross as well as homely, because it does not agree with him to study late at night.

Last evening when I put on my golf-cape and ran up to the workshop for a little chat I found the poor boy sitting in the flying-machine with

his overcoat on,—it is *cold* in the workshop, let me tell you,—pegging away at his Latin. He looked up over his glasses and scowled at me.

“Won’t it make you dream worse than ever to sit there, dear?” I asked.

“The sails keep the draughts off,” answered Hazard in sepulchral tones.

“What are you studying, Haze?” I ventured next.

“My lessons,” came the communicative croak.

Nice, chummy conversation that! So I retired.

But I suppose I may as well be honest and admit that none of the reasons I have mentioned yet have anything to do with making me unhappy. It is about Robin. We ought to take such good care of him,—and we can’t! Thursday he caught cold sitting on the draughty floor; and, as usual, it settled in his little lame side. So mother kept him in bed yesterday morning, and I amused

him with games and stories;—but after lunch he grew feverish and tired.

“Would you like me to read again, Bobsie?” I asked.

“No, thank you, honey,” he answered, and turned his head wearily among the pillows.

“Would you like to play ‘Tommy-Come-Tickle-Me,’ or ‘Thumbs Up’?”

“No, dear, they aren’t a bit of good when your legs ache. Sing, please.”

“What shall I sing?” I asked.

“About Heaven,” said Bobsie,—“like we did last Sunday night.”

It wasn’t a bit priggish, the way he said it,—just simple, and wistful, and very sweet.

So I took him in my arms in the big rocking-chair and sang all the heaven hymns I know. First, “There’s a Home for Little Children,” then “Jerusalem the Golden,” and,

“I heard a sound of voices
Around the great white throne,

With harpers harping on their harps
To Him that sits thereon."

When I came to that last beautiful verse,

"O Lamb of God Who reignest!
Thou Bright and Morning Star,
Whose glory lightens that new earth
Which now we see from far!
O worthy Judge eternal!
When Thou dost bid us come,
Then open wide the gates of pearl,
And call Thy servants home,"

the thought flashed through me, "What if God should really take Robin from us,—him, too, as well as father!" And I stopped singing, and hugged him tight, and hurt his little, aching back!

"What's the matter, Elizabeth?" asked Bobsie, fretfully. "I was just going to sleep."

"Nothing, honey," I answered.

But that night after I had gone to bed the terror returned, and I could not get any peace or rest. I could not say my prayers right, either, for it seemed as if heaven were full of harping,

and singing voices, and God would not hear. So I tossed and turned, till finally I woke Ernie.

"What's the matter, Elizabeth?" she asked, just as Robin had.

"Oh, Ernie," I answered. "I'm so unhappy! I've been thinking that perhaps Bobsie is going to die."

"Well, of course we're all going to some day," answered Ernie, sleepily. But she slipped her hand into mine like a cuddlesome kitten, and somehow I felt comforted.

Dr. Porter says that what Robin needs is "all the luxuries." That is, to go away in the summer to the seashore or mountains, to have good nourishing food, proper clothing, and plenty of fresh air all the year round, and neither to be overstimulated nor worried. Nice possible prescription, *that!* Uncle George means to do what is right, I am sure; but, oh, why can't he say,—

"Here is \$5,000. Take it, and make Robin well." If it were Georgie who was ill!

That reminds me that Geof was in this afternoon, quite sulky and injured because he had to go to the opera this evening.

"Meta has a friend staying with her," he explained. "And they prance round and see everything. That's all right; but why do they have to lug me along?"

"Poor Geof," purred Ernie, who is always sympathetic. "What is it going to be?"

"Oh, I don't know," answered Geoffrey. "They're all the same. A fellow in pink pants gets up and bellows at the top of his lungs,—'*Ish leap a dish!*' The lady answers to the same tune, only shriller, and then they both die. Giddy show that!"

We could not help laughing; but how I wish I were going in Geof's place!

Mother would be sorry if she could see what I have written to-day. I think she would call it cowardly. She always faces things so bravely, dear mother!—and if she can be cheerful and

light-hearted I am sure the rest of us should be.
I'll try,—I will,—I will,—whatever comes!

Sunday, November 30.

ROBIN is better. This morning he woke quite free from pain, so mother has let him up again. Perhaps God did hear, in spite of the harping,—foolish Elizabeth!

Monday, December 1.

MRS. HUDSON is going, and, oh dear! we can't afford it. It is all Ernie's fault, too. How could she have been so careless!

This is the way it happened. *We have had a visit from Mrs. Bo-gardus!* No one would have believed it possible; no one really, I suppose, except Miss Brown and Robin, entirely believed there was any "sich a person." But to-day her existence was proven to us. Let me begin at the beginning and explain.

Mrs. Hudson has been with us six months now, renting the second-story alcove room; and during all that time, whether the beefsteak was tough or the house cold, she has never personally complained. It has been rather,—

“My friend Mrs. *Bo-gardus* simply couldn’t endure such a draught as this. It would give her pneumonia directly. She is a very sensitive woman;—what I call a true blood aristocrat.”

“Is she indeed?” Miss Brown would murmur, antiphonically responsive. Miss Brown is meek, and meagre, and easily impressed.

“Yes,” Mrs. Hudson would continue, swelling visibly under the arrested attention of the entire dinner table (for everybody listens when Mrs. Hudson talks):—“That is what I should certainly call her. Now a soup such as we are eating this evening simply wouldn’t *sit* on Mrs. *Bo-gardus*’s stummick. It is too thick.”

“Her stummick is too thick?” queries Mr. Hancock, anxiously. He is a dyspeptic, himself,

and very much interested in anything pertaining to symptoms or dietetics.

“Not at all,” answers Mrs. Hudson, slightly ruffled at the misapprehension. “The *soup* is too thick.”

Whereupon Mr. Hancock, who has been eating quite comfortably up to the present moment, takes to stirring round and round his plate with reproachful sweeps of the spoon, till his wife inquires soothingly,—

“Don’t you think we might try some of that Glucose Bread we saw advertised, Ducky? I’m sure Mrs. Graham would get it for you.”

The Hancocks are young, and recently married. He is a bank clerk with poppy eyes; she is small, and plump, and pretty. They are “Ducky” and “Dovie” to each other,—but they are really nice and considerate, so one feels rather shabby to poke fun.

However, to return to Mrs. *Bo-gardus*. It was not only what she could not eat. She had a

great many opinions as well, especially as to how people "in reduced circumstances" should live.

"Mrs. *Bo-gardus* thinks that if you can only afford one servant you should certainly engage *two*, for there is nothing that pays so well as style."

She also "thought" a great many other things,—I can't pause to relate them here,—and no matter how patently absurd her opinions might be, they were reported as such Delphic utterances that no one dreamed of questioning them.

Every fortnight or so Mrs. Hudson has been in the habit of paying Mrs. *Bo-gardus* a call. One always learned at the breakfast table when one of these visits was about to take place, for Mrs. Hudson dressed for them upon rising, no matter what time of day she may have planned to start, in a purple velvet walking-suit, with white linen collar and cuffs, and a very much crimped blond false front. Her own hair is decidedly gray. When she goes to church, or shopping with Miss

Brown, or even to the theatre, this answers. It is only for Mrs. *Bo-gardus* the blond crimps appear.

Naturally this morning when Mrs. Hudson descended upon us "in full panoply of war-paint," as Haze expressed it, we supposed she must be going to pay one of her ceremonial visits. Both mother and I felt relieved, for the house continued cold despite all our efforts; but we made no remark, and Mrs. Hudson volunteered no information till Rose appeared, rather untidy as to dress and apron, bearing a plate of slightly burned biscuits. Then it began.

"Mrs. *Bo-gardus*'s establishment consists of three maids and an imported butler. His name is Samuels,—with an *s*, if you please, Miss Brown. One can judge from that fact alone of the style to which she is accustomed."

"Yes, indeed," murmured Miss Brown.

"Now, anything like *this*," continued Mrs. Hudson, helping herself to a biscuit and weighing

it accusingly on extended palm, "simply wouldn't *sit* on Mrs. *Bo-gardus's* stummick. She is used to lunching at Sherry's or the Waldorf, every day, if she pleases. However, I have warned her she must expect to find things different *here*. She is fully prepared; for I explained everything when I issued my invitation."

"Mrs. *Bo-gardus! here!*" exclaimed mother, setting down the cream jug with undue suddenness; while Mr. Hancock, who had been morosely weighing his biscuit in servile imitation of Mrs. Hudson, dropped it into his coffee cup, and stared with popping eyes.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Hudson, evidently very well satisfied with the impression she was producing. "Haven't I mentioned that I am expecting a visit from Mrs. *Bo-gardus* to-day? She is coming to lunch with me. It seemed about time I should repay some of her hospitality. I hope my little plan in no way inconveniences any one?"

Haze kicked me under the table. Ernie wrig-

gled ecstatically. Robin sighed, and opened wide, shining eyes; while poor Miss Brown murmured feebly,—

“Mrs. Hudson! Mrs. *Bo-gardus*! oh really!”

Mother was the first to regain her composure.

“We will be very glad to meet any friend of yours, Mrs. Hudson,” she said; “but I am sorry you did not tell me before. It would have been easier to make arrangements.”

“Certainly, I intended to do so,” observed Mrs. Hudson. “But the fact is, the matter slipped my mind.”

We looked at one another in open admiration. Could human cheek be carried further? Mrs. *Bo-gardus* was coming to luncheon, and *the fact had slipped Mrs. Hudson’s mind!*

Gradually the boarders faded from the room, leaving us to a hurried family council. It was Monday; there was cold roast left over from yesterday’s dinner, and a washerwoman in the

kitchen. Yet, strangely enough, no one thought of rebellion or complaint.

"Mrs. *Bo-gardus*," murmured Haze, in a voice as nearly like Miss Brown's as he could make it, "Mrs. *Bo-gardus*, you know, is coming to lunch!"

And then, for no earthly assignable reason, we dropped into various receptacles along the way and melted and sobbed with mirth. Robin caught his knees in both arms and rolled over and over on the rug, a corner of the tablecloth stuffed in his mouth. Ernie began to caper and frisk madly about, hugging the bewildered and rebellious kitten. I sank helpless on the window-seat, and hid my face among the curtains.

"Shut the door, Hazard," gasped mother, as soon as she was able to articulate. "They mustn't *hear* us!"

At which the gale began afresh. Somehow the situation struck us as irresistibly funny.

"Well," chuckled Hazard, weakly at last,

“there’s no lark here for me. I shan’t meet her. I’ll be away at school.”

“And I have a holiday to-day and to-morrow, because they are repairing the furnaces! How jolly!” cried Ernie.

“Will she come in a hansim?” piped Robin, “or by fairy?”

He meant the ferry; and these two modes of conveyance are the most elegant known to his youthful experience.

“Yankee-doodle came to town,
Riding in a han-som!”—

parodied Haze.

“And driven by Samuels,—with an *s*, if you please, Miss Brown,” mocked Ernie, wickedly.

“Children! children!” warned mother. “We must be serious. It is Mrs. *Bo-gardus*, you know;—and I had planned cold veal for luncheon!”

“Not even chicken?” pleaded Ernestine.

The situation as one faced it loomed portentous. The psychic power of that Name was not to be lightly evaded.

"Well," said mother, at last, with a little sigh, "we must do the best we can. Elizabeth will help me in the kitchen, Rose is never the least good of a Monday, and Ernestine can dress Robin and superintend the setting of the table. Let me see, there will be six, seven, of us,—eliminating Haze and Mr. Hancock, who fortunately do not lunch at home. I like an even table so much better."

"Let me wait then, mother dear," volunteered Ernie. "The way I do Sunday evenings when Rose is out. You know she never does serve things properly."

"You would not mind?" asked mother.

"No, indeed; not a bit," answered Ernie, frankly. "Everybody will know I am your daughter, just the same, and I think it is rather fun."

So it was arranged. The *menu* took a little longer to plan; and with cooking, dusting, and dressing, the morning flew swiftly by. One might have supposed we were preparing for a royal visit.

Eleven o'clock struck,—half-past eleven. Robin and Ernie in their pretty blue sailor-suits flashed down to the kitchen for inspection.

“Will she be here soon?” pranced Robin. His eyes were bright as stars, his cheeks as pink as roses.

“I think so,” answered mother. “Run up to the nursery now, where you can watch from the window.”

At quarter to twelve precisely there sounded the clatter of horses' feet upon the asphalt. Shall I confess it? Interrupting a hasty toilet I ran to the window, too, and peeped out like any child.

A hansom-cab, as Robin had predicted, was drawn up before our door. From it stepped a middle-aged lady. She was tall, somewhat

spare, attired in conventional black. From the distance at which I surveyed her she looked a little, just a *little*, like—*Miss Brown!* She mounted the steps and rang the bell.

The excitement died from my brain. A chill feeling of disappointment crept over me. Was this the phoenix? this the invisible mentor under whose *dicta* our household had trembled for so many months? A minute later the sound of subdued greeting floated up from the hall below.

“How do you do, Mrs. Hudson?”

“How do *you* do, Mrs. *Bo-gardus?*”

I went into the nursery to capture Robin and give his locks one final dab before lunch should be announced.

“She’s just like anybody else,” he mourned, lifting a tear-stained face from where it had been buried in his arm against the window sill.

“Well, dearest, what did you expect?” I asked, with an absurd inflection of sympathetic woe.

"I don't know," admitted Bobsie, "but, somehow, I thought—she would be *different*."

Then the bell rang, and we hastened downstairs.

In the dining-room the presentations were being made.

"Mrs. Graham, allow me the Honour of Presenting my friend Mrs. *Bo-gardus*; Mrs. *Bo-gardus*, Mrs. Graham.— Miss Brown, allow me to Present my friend Mrs. *Bo-gardus*; Mrs. *Bo-gardus*, Miss Brown.— Mrs. Hancock, allow me the Honour of Presenting my friend Mrs. *Bo-gardus*; etc.—"

Immediately our spirits rose. It was an Occasion, after all. Mrs. Hudson felt it, I felt it, Robin felt it. He put out his little hand quite prettily when his turn came.

"So this is the lame boy?" remarked Mrs. *Bo-gardus*, in a stiff falsetto.

"No," protested Robin (I don't think he had

ever been called lame, before), "I just hop a little, because sometimes my side aches."

"It is the same thing, my dear," explained Mrs. Hudson. "Mrs. *Bo-gardus* knows all about such matters. She sits on two hospitals boards, and is Secretary of the Free Kindergarten Association."

"Indeed!" murmured Miss Brown.

With Mrs. Hudson as expositor, and Miss Brown as chorus, Mrs. *Bo-gardus's* glory could not wane. She shone upon us, enigmatic, sphinx-like, throughout a somewhat oppressive meal. No one but Mrs. Hudson ventured to mingle in the conversation. Indeed, it was not necessary. Ernie waited very prettily; the croquettes were silently engulfed, likewise the custards. And, despite Mrs. *Bo-gardus's* sensitive "stummick," we were encouraged to believe that they would *sit*.

"My dear, will you play for us?" Mrs. Hudson asked after lunch. "Mrs. *Bo-gardus* is very fond of music." It was rather a royal command than

a request, but without an *e* string what could one do?

“Then perhaps your little brother will recite?” persisted Mrs. Hudson.

“What shall I say, Elizabeth?” asked Robin, obligingly.

“Suppose you say ‘My Shadow,’ ” I suggested.

So Bobsie, flushed and honoured, standing on the worn Bokhara rug, began:—

“I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.”

The ladies sat about the parlour, their hands folded in their laps, Mrs. *Bo-gardus* with her head a little to one side as if listening for a false note, Mrs. Hudson pompously responsible, Miss Brown meekly appreciative.

“The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow,—

Not at all like proper children, which is always rather slow,”

piped Robin in his pretty treble.

"For he sometimes shoots up taller,—"

Mrs. *Bo-gardus's* head tilted just a little to the left.

"Shoots?" queried Mrs. Hudson. "Are you sure of that word *Shoots?*"

Robin paused, and looked doubtfully at me.

"Yes," I answered. "Shoots is right."

"——like an india-rubber ball,"

continued Robin.

Mrs. *Bo-gardus's* head again cocked towards the left, and a slightly pained expression gathered between her brows.

"Isn't it *plant*, my dear?" corrected Mrs. Hudson. "Since the first word is *shoots* it certainly must be an india-rubber *plant?*"

"No," I said, "ball is right."

"And he sometimes gets so little that there's none of him at all,"

persisted Robin, bravely.

Mrs. *Bo-gardus* pursed her lips.

"Well, well," concluded Mrs. Hudson, hur-

riedly. "This is a very pretty piece, no doubt, and we are much obliged; but Mrs. Bogardus can't sit here all the afternoon listening to one little boy recite, when she might hear twenty any day she pleased, all with kindergarten training, too! There are some photographs we have planned to look over upstairs, so *if* you will excuse us——" And the two ladies, rising with majestic accord, swept from the room.

It was rather dampening, to be sure, but Bobsie bore it well. Only his lower lip trembled a little as he asked,—

"It couldn't have been a rubber-plant, now could it, Ellie?" That is his pet name for me. He uses it when he stands in need of comfort.

"No, honey," I answered. "It certainly couldn't."

When just at that moment there was a crash, and a hurtle, and a smothered squeal in the hall outside, and we all ran out to see what could be happening.

I shall never forget it. Down the stairway from the second story, step after step, with a little bump on each, coasted Ernie. Her feet were stuck out straight before her, her arms were aloft, in one hand she bore a pitcher of ice-water, in the other a tumbler, while mother's old silver serving tray rattled and rolled ahead. The poor child's mouth was open, and every few steps she would emit a deprecating little squeak, as if to say:—

"I know I ought not to be tumbling downstairs. But what are you going to do about it?"

Mrs. Hudson and Mrs. Bo-gardus, who had started to go up in search of the photographs, stood midway of the flight, directly in the path of danger.

"Ernie! Oh, Ernie!" I cried. "Look out! Look out for Mrs. Bo-gardus!"

"I c-c-c-can't!" gurgled Ernie. "Let her g-get——"

And then there was a second crash, and a splash, and a renewed series of squeals, and Mrs. Hudson, and Mrs. *Bo-gardus*, and Ernie, and the pitcher, and the silver tray, all came crashing and bumping down together in one ignominious tangle.

Mother, and Mrs. Hancock, and Rose came running from various parts of the house. In a moment there was quite a crowd gathered.

First Mrs. Hudson was picked up, spluttering and bewildered; next we rescued Mrs. *Bo-gardus*; then Ernie, who still clung desperately to her half-empty pitcher. All dignity, all sense of social circumstance, had vanished. The members of the dripping little group glared upon one another, humanly, democratically mad.

"Here," said Ernestine, thrusting out the pitcher resentfully to Mrs. Hudson, "I guess this belongs to you."

"*This*" was the ceremonial blond front, which had somehow come unpinned in the *mêlée*, and

was now floating mermaid-wise in a few inches of ice-water at the bottom of the pitcher.

Mrs. Hudson sniffed, fished out her crimps, and flapped them scornfully.

"I leave this house to-morrow," she remarked. "Children are all very well in their *place!*"

"It wasn't my *place*," contradicted Ernie, wrathfully. "I slipped on the top step and to-bogganed!"

"Ernestine!" rebuked mother. "I trust you are not hurt," she continued, turning to Mrs. Bogardus, who stood beside the newel-post, ruefully rubbing an elbow.

"Not being a Christian Scientist, nor yet a gutta-percha image, I confess to a few bruises," returned that lady, spitefully; after which she and Mrs. Hudson swept on their way upstairs, leaving us at gaze.

"As if I meant to," brooded Ernestine. "I'm not a Christian Scientist, myself. Why couldn't

they get out of the way, I'd like to know? and—*who's Mrs. Bogardus, anyhow?*”

For the first time the question was presented to us squarely. We gaped at one another, like so many goldfish.

“That is so,” admitted Miss Brown in a timid voice, after a moment of deep thought. “Who is she?”

“And it couldn't have been a rubber-plant,” chirped Bobsie with sudden easy confidence, “because then there wouldn't be any rhyme.”

“It was a hired hansom she came in,” observed Mrs. Hancock, cheerfully. “And did you notice that she ate three of those fried croquettes for lunch? Her stummick can't be so very sensitive, after all! I shall have to tell my husband!”

Certainly, Ernestine's pitcher of ice-water had had a wonderfully quenching effect! But Mrs. Hudson is going, and, as I said, we can't afford it.

"I was only trying to help," murmurs Ernie, mournfully pulling off one of her long stockings, as she sits on the floor in the middle of our little room. "Do stop writing, Elizabeth, and come to bed. There is a smudge of ink on the tip of your nose where you dipped it in the bottle, and I just know you are saying it is *all my fault!*"

Dear little Ernie, how did she ever guess?

Tuesday, December 2.

MRS. HUDSON left this afternoon, despite the fact that Ernie apologised to her very meekly this morning.

"Do you really think I ought, mother?" Ernie asked.

"Yes, dear; I do," mother answered. "She was frightened and hurt and we are all sorry."

Ernie made a wry face. "Perhaps she'll stay, if she knows I did not mean it," she said.

"No," answered mother. "I am sure that she will not. It is not for that reason that I want you

to apologise. Apart from the financial inconvenience I can't regret Mrs. Hudson's decision. In some ways it will be a great relief."

"Well, here goes," announced Ernestine. "The little Christian martyr bids a last bye-bye to her fond family." And she turned and ran from the room.

She found Mrs. Hudson packing.

"You know I did not mean to tumble downstairs, Mrs. Hudson," she told me later that she said:—"and I'm sorry that I had the pitcher with me. I was taking it up to your room for Mrs. Bo-gardus."

"You seemed to be coming *down* the stairs when we met you," returned Mrs. Hudson, suspiciously.

"Yes," confessed Ernie. "I know it. I had brought up only one glass. I was going back for another, and my foot tripped."

"Well," returned Mrs. Hudson, evidently quite unmollified, "we will say no more about it. For

a long time I have felt that a change would be desirable. Yesterday's incident simply confirmed me in my half-formed resolution. I am going from here to stop with a Friend for a day or two, till I can look around and get more comfortably settled."

"I hope you will have a good time, I'm sure," observed Ernie, forgivingly. "But I wouldn't want to visit her."

Mrs. Hudson stared. "*You?*" she queried. "Oh, my dear!"

And directly after lunch she left us, and Ernie started in on a wild hunt for "the dump-cart contract." To look for the contract is Ernie's last resource in times of trouble.

"It must be somewhere, Elizabeth," she argues, "and why not about the house? We know perfectly well that father went especially to get it signed that afternoon. He wouldn't have come away without it. Perhaps it's poked in a bureau-drawer, or under the blotting-paper on

his desk, or maybe even back of the cuckoo-clock!"

And so, though these very places have been ransacked again and again, Ernie proceeded to turn the workshop upside down;—covered herself with dust crawling under Hazard's cot, skinned the tip of her nose on the gas-fixtured, and tore a great rent in her pink flannel petticoat.

About three o'clock Geof dropped in, as he generally does on his way home from school, and joined in the chase.

"Do you mean to say you have really lost a Boarder?" he asked, summing the catastrophe with a worried look. "You can't afford it, can you?"

"No," answered Ernie, mournfully, "we can't. I just wish mother would whip me, as I deserve. It's awful to love your family, Geof, and be nothing to them but a misfortune. Perhaps, if we don't let Mrs. Hudson's room soon, we won't be able to afford ice cream on Sundays, and Mr.

Hancock likes ice cream better than anything in the world. *They* will be leaving next."

"Oh, cheer up," said Geoffrey. "You're not a misfortune to anybody, Ernie. If only Uncle Dudley had finished this,"—the three of us were standing rather disconsolately about the flying-machine,—"you wouldn't have to think of boarders, or dump-carts, or anything like that. You'd be rich, and famous, too. Did he ever make an ascension, do you know?"

"Once, late at night, he tried," answered Ernestine. "But I don't think it was a success. He only rose a few feet from the roof, and then got tangled in some of the neighbours' clothes-lines. Come on, Geof. Let's look once more in the cuckoo-clock. It stands at the foot of the stairs, you know. Father might have stopped to wind it, and slipped the agreement into the works by mistake. It buzzed fearfully the last time we tried to make it go,—as if it were suffering from some sort of impediment."

Entertaining no personal hope in regard to the cuckoo-clock, I left them on the landing and ran down to the dining-room, where I found Haze, who had also just come in. He was standing in the window, looking ruefully over the gas bill, which the postman had handed him through the grating.

"So Mrs. Hudson has really gone?" he began, throwing off his overcoat. "Well, as far as I can see, that means just one thing."

"What does it mean, Haze?" I asked, surprised at his tone.

"That I give up High School," answered Hazard gloomily, and cast his books and cap together upon a chair.

"Oh, Hazey!" I protested. "Wouldn't that be rash? We may let Mrs. Hudson's room tomorrow."

"We may," returned Hazard, "but we won't."

Then he seated himself astride the chair, his

arms folded across the back, his chin resting upon his arms.

"It's this way, Elizabeth," he began. "I'm the man of the family, and I mustn't shirk my responsibilities."

"But you aren't shirking, Hazard," I urged, settling myself in the window-seat opposite him. "You are working, and working hard, to finish your education. It would be a dreadful thing for you to give up now,—it would mean a handicap for years, perhaps for life."

"Some fellows have got to accept a handicap," answered Hazard. "And the very fact that they know it spurs them on,—so that in the end, perhaps, it isn't a bad thing. I've been doing a lot of thinking lately; but I couldn't make up my mind and so I wouldn't talk, not even to you, old girl. But this is how it stands. I can't bear to see mother struggling along with the house, and Robin, and all her worries,—trying to satisfy everybody, being snubbed sometimes, and—un-

appreciated. At first, I thought I'd give up college (you know, I'd intended going in for the Conklin Scholarship, and every one said I would win it, too), but even so there would be two more years of study, and I'm not sure I could keep up the pace I've set myself lately. Then, I had a talk with Merriweather the other day" (Dr. Merriweather is the principal of Hazard's school), "which wasn't altogether satisfactory. He doesn't think a fellow gets any good cramming the way I've been doing, and he intimated that even if I took the examinations next fall, and passed 'em, he wasn't at all sure that he would graduate me. Well, that pretty nearly settled the business, and now this affair at home drives in the last nail. I'm going to quit, and take my proper place as the head of the family."

"But, Hazard," I urged, "don't you think you ought to consult mother, or some older person, first? It's a very grave step for you to take on your own responsibility. And besides, I don't

believe mother will *let* you be the head of the family. And who would employ you? and what sort of position could you fill?"

"That depends upon the acumen of the man to whom I apply," returned Hazey, with such an owly look through his big glasses that I really wanted to laugh. "You know, Elizabeth, how Uncle George is continually repeating that though he doesn't care for talent in his business he is willing to pay for 'brains.' I've got 'em, and I'm going to rent them to him! It's a sacrifice, but I've made up my mind, so there's no use arguing."

"But you'll wait till the end of the week, any way, dear," I pleaded. "Give us that long, at least, to rent the room."

"Yes; I'll wait till Saturday," compromised Hazard. "We shall have finished the Punic Wars by that time, and I've written a rather stunning outline on the subject I should like to have criticised. But if the room isn't rented by then I

quit. Now, remember, Elizabeth, not a word of this to anybody,—especially Ernestine. I don't want her to feel that she is in any way responsible for blighting my career."

"I won't tell," I answered; and so, of course, I haven't; but, oh, I am very much afraid that Hazard is making a mistake!

Wednesday, December 3.

WE advertised Mrs. Hudson's room to-day. It cost a dollar. Ernie wanted to say that we are a refined Christian family with a good table, but mother would not hear of it;—which was lucky, considering the price! When the advertisement was finally ready, Haze and I took it around to the newspaper office;—and the long shining shafts cast by the electric-lights on the wet asphalt (it had been raining) made us feel quite frisky. I would rather be a mediæval knight than a girl whose mother keeps a board-

ing-house,—but, as Haze observed, there are diversions in every lot.

Friday, December 5.

THIS morning we had a call from Aunt Adelaide. She came “to advise” us, because she had heard about Mrs. Hudson. Aunt Adelaide does not call very often; but when she does, she makes the best of her time. To-day she had Georgie with her,—so charmingly dressed! He wore a dear little fur-lined overcoat, and a cap with snug ear-laps, and a jaunty cockade. How I wanted them for Robin!—who took cold yesterday when Ernie had him out on her sled. It was the first snowstorm of the season, and Bobs did so beg to go; but to-day he is in bed again, suffering with rheumatism in his back. Dear, patient, little lamb!

“So much sickness is most unfortunate,” reproved Aunt Adelaide. “Can’t you subordinate the children a little more, Margaret? How can

you expect people to stop in a house where there is continual invalidism?"

"I don't expect it," returned mother, cheerfully. "It is a perpetual surprise to me that anybody *should* stay."

Aunt Adelaide stiffened. "Have you considered the consequences if they did not?" she asked.

"Yes," admitted mother. "We should starve, I suppose,—since man does not live by advice alone."

"George was really very much put out when he heard that you had lost Mrs. Hudson," continued Aunt Adelaide. "It is most discouraging. You were beginning to get along quite nicely;—and a man who has so many heavy responsibilities naturally feels each extra burden."

"Of course," agreed mother. "It must be very trying to have poor relations, I am sure."

Here Georgie interrupted. "You said I should visit with Bobsie, mamma," he cried. "I want

to go up now, and tell him about my new rocking-horse. It's stupid down here."

"Elizabeth will take you, love," answered his mother, apparently without the least thought of "subordination." So I took Georgie by the hand and led him up to the nursery.

When I returned to the library the conversation had been switched:

"Positively, he grows worse and worse," Aunt Adelaide was saying as I entered the room. "Yesterday he was openly impertinent to me, and flatly refused to accompany Meta to dancing-school. I do not wish to bring the affair to his father, who is rather severe at times, but I declare there is no managing the boy. He won't study, he has no manners, and he resents interference in any direction."

It was Geoffrey, of course—and I felt sorry. So did mother. The mocking note had quite died from her voice, as she answered simply and kindly,—

"I think you are a little unjust, Adelaide. Geoffrey requires tactful handling, I know. He is apt to be sullen at times; he is not bookish; but in his own way, along the mechanical line, it seems to me that he is really clever."

Aunt Adelaide sighed. "Heaven forbid his being an inventor! One is misfortune enough for any family."

Mother merely smiled that little quiet smile of hers, and asked how Meta was progressing with her music. She will never discuss father with either Aunt Adelaide or Uncle George;—but the attack was not to be so easily repelled, and Aunt Adelaide returned to it a moment later by asking bluntly if there had been any further news of Mr. Perry, and whether we had given up all hope of finding the contract.

"George says the whole affair is entirely typical of poor Dudley," she declared. "He has not an ounce of patience with it."

And then, after a few further generalities,

Aunt Adelaide prepared to leave, quite unconscious that she had said anything to wound or offend any one, and I was sent upstairs to fetch Georgie.

I knew that there was trouble as soon as I opened the nursery door. For Bobs in his little old flannel dressing-gown was sitting up very straight and white-lipped in mother's big bed pretending to look at a picture-book; while Georgie, with red face and hands thrust deep in his knickerbocker-pockets, was standing by the window, pretending to look out.

"I'll tell you something more you don't know," said Robin, glancing up from his book after a moment's silence. They had neither of them seen me enter the room. "Shall I?"

"I know more'n you do!" chanted Georgie, monotonously.

"You don't know what a Chimera is; and you don't know what a Gorgon is; and you don't know what a Hippogrif is; and you don't know

what a Ninkum is! You wouldn't if you saw one! And you don't know what a Siren is; and you don't know what Syrian is, now neither! Do you?"

George seemed rather overpowered by this erudite outburst; but he reiterated stubbornly:—"I know more'n you do!"

"What's a Very Imp?" asked Bobs, excitedly. "You don't know! And what's a Jabberwock? and what's a Mockturtle?"

"You eat it in soup," answered Georgie, brightening up a bit. "We had it the night the General came, and William let me taste some out of a teaspoon in the butler's pantry,—so there!"

"*Nonsense!*" Bobs' scorn was withering. "Maybe you'd eat a Ninkum in fish-cakes! *We* don't! A Mockturtle was once a real turtle, and——"

But here I thought it best to interfere. "Aunt Adelaide is going, Georgie," I said. "You had better come downstairs, now."

As soon as Georgie saw me he put his finger in his mouth and began to cry and asked to be taken down to mamma, for Bobsie was rude to him and said he didn't know things.

"That certainly is not very polite,—to company!" I answered for Robin's best good; and took Georgie by the hand and led him away. But just as we reached the foot of the stairs we heard the unrepentant Robin sing out triumphantly,—

"I'll tell you some more things you don't know, too. You don't know what a Crusader is, nor a Centaur, nor you don't know *nothing!*"

Georgie was quite overcome by this last taunt. He clenched his fist savagely. "I just guess I do know sompfin'," he sobbed. "I'm going to ask mamma if I don't." And he broke away from me, and ran into the parlour.

Of course, Aunt Adelaide soothed him, and assured him that he knew a great deal for a little

boy of his age, but that he must be patient with his little sick cousin.

So Georgie stopped crying and looked virtuous; while Aunt Adelaide explained to mother that she knew just how it was in regard to Robin, and thought it only natural that he should be pettish and quarrelsome, and that she would bring Georgie soon again to cheer him up! After which our visitors departed in quite a pleasant glow of self-satisfaction; and mother went downstairs to the kitchen,—very mad,—to superintend the preparation of luncheon; and I ran up to the nursery,—very mad,—to try and soothe Robin's ruffled spirits.

Nor did it take me long to learn the cause of the disagreement,—for Bobsie was only too eager to confide. It seems that among his other new possessions Georgie has a nursery governess who is teaching him to read, and though Robin did not mind about the pony, and never once thought of envying the fur-lined overcoat and cap, he could

not bear to be told that Georgie knew more than he did! The idea is really ridiculous to any one who knows the two children; but, on the whole, it had been an excellent thing for Master Robin to face, for now he is determined to learn to read, too,—a proposition we could never get him to entertain before, as he always said “he preferred to lie still and listen.” I am to give him lessons each morning, and if he sets his mind to it, I am sure he will get on rapidly.

Just think! dearest Haze walked home from school this afternoon,—though it is over three miles,—and bought a string for my mandolin with his car fare. Not many brothers would think of a thing like that.

Sunday, December 7.

MRS. HUDSON’S room is not yet rented. We have not even had any answers to our advertisement. The strain is beginning to tell on us all more or less, I think; and yesterday

morning Hazard carried out his intention of calling at Uncle George's office and applying for a position. I wish he hadn't. Mother agrees with me that it was a mistake. Indeed, she was quite shocked and hurt at what she considered his lack of confidence in her. She told him very gravely that he had no right to take a step of so much consequence without her consent, and that the little he can make will in no way compensate for the loss of his education. Poor Haze! he was so disappointed. He had expected the news would be received very differently. He did not say much, but thrust his hands deep into his trouser pockets, threw back his head, and strolled whistling from the room. I followed up to the workshop as soon as I was able, and I *think* he had been crying.

"Well, tell me about your position, Haze," I began, in as sprightly tones as I could muster; for we had not heard any of the details yet.

"There's nothing to tell," answered Hazard, gruffly. "I'm to run errands, post letters, and that sort of thing, at three dollars a week."

"Oh, Hazey!" I gasped, for it was a shock. Hazard is certainly clever, and we had always expected such different things for him.

"Yes," says Haze, bitterly. "It's Uncle George's idea, and I *suppose* he knows what he is about. I gave him every opportunity, and put the matter to him squarely. There was no use in false modesty; so I told him, first thing, that I had had a year of Greek, and two years of Latin, and led my geometry class; but that we needed money at home, and so I had determined to sacrifice my future, and rent my brains at their highest market value."

"Did you really say all that?" I asked.

"Yes, I did," answered Hazard, a little defiantly. "Perhaps it was a mistake, but I wanted to make things plain. Uncle George didn't answer just at first. He looked me up and down

in that way he has, and then he said,—‘Young fellow, you’ve got a lot to learn yet. If any other cockerel came crowing to me in my office, I’d show him the door. Understand one thing. I haven’t any use for *talent* in my business’ (though I had been most particular, Elizabeth, to use the word *brains*). ‘Can you remember what’s told you? Can you sweep out a room, and not forget the corners? Can you jump when sent of errands? Then apply to Mr. Bridges in the outside office. I believe we’re losing a boy to-day. Perhaps you are bright enough to fill his place,—though you don’t look it.’

“Well, I applied, and got the position,” concluded Haze, “and that’s all there is to it.”

There did not seem much for me to say, since Haze was not in a mood to be grateful for platitudes. Uncle George was certainly severe, but maybe he meant it for a lesson; and from something that happened this afternoon I am tempted to think it was not entirely wasted.

We were all gathered in the workshop after dinner, Geoffrey, Ernie, and myself, wrapped in golf-cloaks and overcoats, disputing about our favourite apostles, when Haze, who had been rather subdued and "broodful" the greater part of the day, entered the room. He had a notebook under his arm.

"Going to study, Hazey?" I asked him, for he intends to keep up his Latin, and mother has promised to help.

"No," he answered, with really appalling solemnity. "I have written my first Poem."

"Your first What?" roars Geof.

"Poem," admitted Haze, blushing a bit.

"My hat!" murmurs Geof. "This is so sudden! But go on, old chap. Let's have it,—don't mind me."

"If you treat the matter with respect," says Haze, suddenly on his dignity, "I'll read it to you. Otherwise I won't."

"Fire ahead," urged Geoffrey, who was simply

on the *qui vive* to hear. "We're as respectful as you please. We'll listen, and then criticise."

"No larks, mind," warned Hazard. "According to my own ideas this is the real stuff."

And, as we settled ourselves to attention in the flying-machine, he began, in what I can only call an "uplifted" sort of voice,—

THE YOUNG MAN AND THE WORLD.

The young man faces the stern, cold world,—
"Oyster!" he says, "O oyster!—"

There was an hysterical gurgle from Geof, and a fierce "Keep quiet, can't you!" from Ernestine.

"I've told you," says Hazard, interrupting himself to look severely over his glasses, "that it is perfectly indifferent to me whether you hear this thing or not. I don't care a hang for your literary opinions,—and I'll not be guyed about it."

"Go on," pleaded Geoffrey, with a watery, sidelong look at me. "Who's guying you?"

So Haze began afresh,—

THE YOUNG MAN AND THE WORLD.

The young man faces the stern, cold world,—
“Oyster!” he says, “O oyster!
Open thy shell, and show me thy pearl,
Like the hidden wealth of a cloister.”

The cold world answers never a word.
The youth is bound, if he can,
To take up his pickaxe and work for himself,
Till he prove that he *is* a man!”

“Ho! ho!” exploded Geof, unable to restrain himself a moment longer. “Pickaxe is good! That’s the way to get after ’em! Bully for you, old boy!”

“What do you think, Elizabeth?” says Hazard, haughtily ignoring this demonstration, and turning somewhat coldly to me.

“I’m not sure that you could say hidden wealth of a ‘cloister,’” I answered. “Somehow it doesn’t sound exactly historical.”

“‘Oyster!’ he says, ‘O oyster!’” murmured Geof.

Whereat Ernie, who had controlled herself

beautifully up to that moment, gave vent to one enthusiastic whoop, and disappeared backward into the flying-machine.

“I see,” says Hazey, with really magnificent aplomb, “that I have made a mistake. You are not in the proper mood to appreciate the thing. But whatever other criticisms you may make, at least you’ll be bound to admit that it Sums the Situation.” With which remark he stalked from the room.

Dear, precious fellow! Evidently he has been thinking,—but, why, oh why, will he always take himself so seriously?

Monday, December 8.

THIS afternoon mother let Robin up in the big wicker rocking-chair in the nursery window. He was so glad, poor darling;—for he has spent the last three days in bed.

The street was full of snow; and the boys were having a fine time with their shovels, their sleds,

and a small black-and-tan terrier which pranced here and there, yapping excitedly. Two of the taller fellows were busy making a path in front of their house; a little chap with glowing cheeks and a red cap had improvised a slide on the half-cleared pavement; while others were engaged in a brisk snowball fight.

Bobsie, pale but delighted, watched everything with eager approbation.

"That's the smartest dog!" he cried. "His name is Buster. Come and see, Elizabeth. If he thinks they're going to hit him with a snowball, he'll run away,—but, if he thinks they're going to hit somebody else, he'll just stand and bark and wag his tail. You can't fool Buster!"

"How do you know his name?" I asked.

"Pooh!" boasted Bobs, "that's easy;—for a person who looks out of windows as much as me. I know all the boys' names, too, and where they live, and whether they have sisters. I pretend that they are my friends, and that I'm out there

playing with them. You can hardly tell the difference, sometimes! We have such fun."

"I'm glad you do, darling," I answered. "Which game do you like best to play?"

"Oh, that depends on the time of year," answered Robin, judicially. "I've watched, until I know all about it. In summer there is Cat and Prisoner's Base; when fall comes we have football in the corner lot, and some of us wear nose-guards; then there's snowballing and sliding all winter; and in the spring, marbles, again. Only, John an' me don't play for keeps, because our mothers wouldn't like it."

"Which is John?" I asked.

"He's the little one with the red cap, who's sliding," answered Robin. "I like him best, because he is such a kind boy. Why, one day, Ellie, when my legs ached so I couldn't pretend to go out, even for a few minutes, John was the only one who missed me! The others kept right on playing:—but he stopped all of a sudden, and

looked up at the window, and smiled. So now I've taken him for my chum:—wouldn't you?"

"Yes, honey," I answered. "I think he must be a very nice little boy."

"He is," agreed Robin, proudly. "The day we broke the baker's window, an' the cop chased us, John ran faster than anybody. Of course, it was easy for me. All I had to do was to pertend to dodge in here and slam the door *quick!* . . . But watch! we're going to give Buster a ride, now. Isn't that fun?"

The black-and-tan terrier seemed to think it was. He kept his place well in the middle of the sled, tail up, tongue lolling, while two of the boys seized the rope and, followed by the others, made madly off,—the gay cavalcade disappearing noisily around the corner.

Robin dropped back among his pillows with a disappointed little sigh.

"I'm sorry they've gone so soon," he said; "because, you see, I can't pertend to play, 'cepting

only on this block.” Then he laid his cheek up against my arm. “Sometimes those little boys must be sick, too, mustn’t they?” he asked. “And I guess it’s pretty hard then, for they aren’t used to it like me. There’s a lot in being used to a thing, isn’t there, Ellie dear?”

Oh, if we could only feel that Robin was growing stronger! I pray for it every night, and so do mother, and Haze, and Ernie, I know;—and we “pertend” to think that he is, and tell each other that it is because of the cold weather he feels wretched so much of the time:—but, in our secret hearts—— Well, the doctor has ordered a new kind of cod-liver oil. It is very nasty, and costs eighty-five cents a bottle. Perhaps it will do Robin good!

Wednesday, December 10.

ERNIE has distinguished herself again. How can she be so naughty, and *never* mean any harm! This time Geoffrey is implicated,

too, but I can only do justice to the affair by constructing it from the beginning, piecing together the details as we learned them in yesterday evening's soul-thrilling confessional.

It seems that the two children were bitterly disappointed a week ago Tuesday when they searched the cuckoo-clock for the lost contract, and found nothing more exciting than a deserted mouse's nest.

"I call it a giddy sell," remarked Ernie, so near to tears that Geof was honestly concerned. "No matter how good you try to be, nor how much you try to help, everything turns against you."

"Oh, cheer up," said Geoffrey. Ernie never looks more bewitching than when her blue eyes swim behind a veil of suspended woe. "What's the good of worrying, Bunnie?"

"I guess you'd worry," returned Ernie, dolefully, "if Georgie were sick, and your family were poor, and you were responsible for making them

more so! It's all very well to say 'cheer up,' Geoffrey Graham, and I'm sure I do most of the time, but this afternoon I want to do something *really useful*."

"Well then, see here," says Geof, a bright idea striking him all of a sudden. "I've got a plan. Come up to the workshop again, where we won't be interrupted, and I'll tell you."

"Is it something in which I can help?" asked Ernie, doubtfully.

"It's a pretty big undertaking," answered Geof, closing the workshop door mysteriously. "I don't believe a girl has ever been concerned in such an affair before;—but, see here, why shouldn't you and I together *perfect Uncle Dudley's flying-machine?*"

"Geoffrey!" cried Ernie, with sparkling eyes. "Could we? truly, do you think?"

"I don't see why we shouldn't," answered Geof, seriously. "I've thought a lot about the matter, without supposing I'd ever have the

chance to put it to the test. I've taken the motor out, and examined it. It is certainly a stunner; and the steering apparatus seems simple enough. You say Uncle Dudley really made one ascension?"

"Not exactly," qualified Ernie. "The machine didn't rise any distance at all. Father was dreadfully disappointed. But later he cheered up and said there was just one little detail that stood between him and 'a complete solution of the problem of aërial navigation.' I remember his very words, and how excited we all were."

"That is what I have always understood," answered Geof. "Uncle would have perfected the thing if he had lived long enough. It's magnificent to contemplate,—and a beastly shame to think of the fruits of his genius lying up here rusting in a totally unknown attic! Why can't you and I take the matter up where he left it, find out the root of the trouble,—just one little detail, you say,—and let Mr. Perry and his old dump-

carts go hang?" It isn't often that Geof waxes eloquent. When he does he is worth listening to.

"We can! we can!" jubilated Ernie, clapping her hands. "Oh, Geof, it's a splendid scheme! Why has no one thought of it before?"

"I have thought of it, often," answered Geoffrey; "but somehow, up to to-day, it seemed impossible. What you've just told me throws an entirely new light on the matter, and I think we are justified at least in trying."

"And if we don't succeed," says Ernie, "nobody need know anything about it."

"That's so," answered Geof. "We'll have to do a lot of hard studying and thinking, and we'll keep the thing a deadly secret;—but I tell you, if we do make it go, *it will be worth while!*"

And so the conspirators set to work. For a week they ransacked father's library, reading up on aëronautics generally, studying every pamphlet and authority they could lay their hands on. There was one thing that especially confused

them. Each man supported a "totally different theory," as Ernie plaintively complained. It was extremely trying, especially as dear father had worked almost entirely in his head, leaving very few directions or specifications to guide them to the right trail. At last Geof declared that he thought they would never get anywhere through books; that their one hope lay in practical experiment. Ernie quite agreed with him, and after that they spent hours in the airship, mastering as they supposed the intricate details of motor, steering apparatus, and machinery. Geoffrey even discovered what he considered a slight error in the automatic system of shifting weights. Finally, last Saturday morning, behind closed doors, the motor was taken out and started up. It ran like a dream. They came to the bold conclusion that nothing remained to hinder an experimental ascension!

All this time it must be understood mother and I had not the faintest suspicion as to what was



AND SO THE CONSPIRATORS SET TO WORK



going on. We knew that there was "a secret" in the workshop, "a beautiful surprise for the family." Just how great a surprise, however, we neither of us dreamed.

Yesterday afternoon was the time set for the ascension. How the two children managed alone to raise the heavy machine from the workshop floor to the roof by means of the trap-door and pulleys father had used in the previous experiment will always remain a mystery. But they did! At last it stood among the chimney-pots, with rakish sails and scarred sides, looking for all the world like "a tipsy eagle-bird," as Ernie enthusiastically declared. Even by this time neither of the little idiots seems to have had the least realisation of *what* it was they were attempting. On the contrary, they were quite wild with the frolic and excitement of the thing.

Geof straightened out the sails, and opened the manœuvre valve. *Tick-tock*, sounded the motor. The framework quivered response.

"Hold on there," shouted Geoffrey, as he ran to attach the short length of anchor line to a hook in the stone coping at the front of the roof. "Don't get in yet, Ernie. The place in the middle belongs to me. I've got to manage the steering gear."

"All right," Ernie answered, climbing over the side, nevertheless. "I'm just looking to see which of these levers starts her."

And then,—no one will ever know how it happened, Geoffrey had his back turned, Ernie can't explain,—there was a whiz, a whirr, deep in the interior regions of the old airship, a sudden tug on the mooring-line that sent Geof sprawling into the tin gutter, and with a swoop, entirely unprecedented, I believe, in the whole history of aerial ascensions, the apparatus had risen, perhaps some twenty feet! The voyage was begun. Ernie, alone in the flying-machine, circled and jibed above the chimney-pots!

Geof, regaining his feet, made one desperate

grab for the safety-line. It slipped through his fingers, and swung to the left,—just out of reach beyond the stone coping.

“*Aunt Peggy! Aunt Peggy!*” he then bawled with such a panic of woe in his voice that mother, who had been sewing on Ernie’s new school-dress in the nursery while I read aloud to her and Robin from *Tanglewood Tales*, dropped her work to the floor and fled up the attic stairs.

I followed at top speed. Geof’s face, thrust on a long neck through the trap-door in the roof, stared whitely down upon us. His eyes and mouth were wide. He looked for all the world like a terror-stricken gargoyle.

“Ernie!” he gasped. “She got away from me. *She’s flying!*”

“Geoffrey!” says mother, stern as any Spartan, “are you mad?”

“No! no!” protested Geof. “Put your head out the window. You’ll see her! I tried to hold her down, but——”

"The flying-machine!" I cried, with one distraught, comprehensive look about the dismantled workshop.

At that moment a clamour rose to us from the street below.

"Have yez got er license?" bawled an infuriated Irish voice. "Come down out ov thot. I arr-rest yez!"

"It's only a kid girl," sang a shrill chorus of gamins. "I seen her petticoats!"

In another instant mother and I were on the roof, straining over the stone coping. Some fifteen feet below us, about on a level with the nursery window now, sailed Ernie. She sat quite rigid in the car, which laboured and beat a curiously straight course between the two rows of houses directly down the middle of the street. We could hear the *tick-tock* of the motor and the excited comments of the crowd.

"Ernie!" I cried. "Oh, Ernie!"

Ernie's pallid countenance was raised to us.

"Good-bye, mother dear!" she wailed in plaintive crescendo. *"Give my pinky ring to Mary Hobart, and——"*

Mother turned. For a moment I thought she was going to jump off the roof. But instead she sped, Geof and I at her heels,—it wasn't running, it wasn't flying,—down the ladder through the workshop, down two flights of stairs to the second story, where, throwing up a window, she reached out in a vain attempt to grasp the short length of dangling anchor-line. But already it was too late. The car and the crowd had passed by.

"This is terrible!" we gasped, and fled for the street.

Here high comedy reigned rampant, if any one had been in a mood to appreciate the fact. Two policemen, one stout and red-faced, the other tall and thin, beat down the block, their eyes aloft, bawling impossible directions. A butcher's boy, followed by a gang of enthusiastic street urchins, had clambered to the roof of his cart, and moving

slowly along directly beneath the labouring machine, rose ever and again in a series of ungainly but agile leaps, clutching hopefully at the surrounding atmosphere. In the area-ways, and gathered on the neighbouring stoops, were groups of excited people. Rose, escaped from the kitchen, had climbed the hydrant in front of our house, where, supported by Mrs. Hancock, she maintained a perilous equilibrium, the while she waved a red cotton lunch cloth and bel-
lowed,—

“Whar yer boun’ fer, Miss Ernie? Fer de Law’s sake tell us whar yer boun’ fer?”

While Miss Brown, her head wrapped in her pink knitted shawl, ran back and forth, clucking like a distraught hen.

“Is she any relation to you, mum?” the red-faced policeman demanded of mother, jerking his thumb severely skyward as he spoke.

“My daughter,” came the distracted response.

“Then call her down,” commanded the minion

of the law. "Oi can't have such goin's-on on my beat!"

"She doesn't know how to manage the machine," mother said. "At any moment it may fall with her. What is to be done?"

"Hi, Bill! ring in an al-lar-rum,—fer the hook-an'-ladder comp'ny, and an amberlance!" shouted the policeman to his mate at the corner.

At the same moment the airship, as if instinct with demoniacal life, ceased for an appreciable instant its laboured progress, began to nose the air uncertainly, and then in a short series of jerky swoops rose, again and again, to an altitude of some hundred feet or so. There it poised, came about in its sweep, rose once more, and finally began to settle with steadily increasing velocity.

We stood spellbound. One could literally hear the breathing of the crowd. The suspense was too horrible. Ernie—our darling Ernie! Could nothing be done to save her?

“’Ware below there!” shouted the taller of the two policemen.

And just then the bow of the ship grazed the roof of the corner house past which it was dropping. There sounded a familiar *tick-tock*. The machine started off in a new direction, bumping along the house-fronts, till finally with a shock of tearing wood and a crash of splintered glass it succeeded in bunting its way half through a second-story window, midway of the block. Where it lodged!

A distinct gasp of relief escaped from the crowd,—followed by a feebly started cheer, which rose and swelled in volume as with clang of bell and clatter of flying hoofs the hook-and-ladder company swung round the corner of the street and bore down upon us.

The next few moments passed for me in a confused sort of dream. When I finally came to myself I found that I was sitting on the lowest

step leading up to the house in the window of which the airship was lodged. Miss Brown sat beside me, firmly clasping her own hand, the while she murmured,—

“We mustn’t faint, my love. We mustn’t! If your dear mother can stand the strain, everybody else should *gladly!*”

The firemen and policemen were gathered in an official group in the gutter, and around them sported and pranced a delighted bunch of street-boys. Mother had disappeared.

In another moment the house door opened, and a whitecapped maid came down the stairs to say to me,—

“Your mamma wishes you to go home to your little brother now, miss. The young lady is quite safe inside. They will follow when the crowd has gone. My! what a fright we’ve had. That there flying-airship-machine not only broke the window, but tore out the sash! I thought it was Judgment Day.”

Well, somehow I managed to get home, where I clasped trembling little Robin in my arms.

"What has happened, Ellie?" he sobbed.

"Ernie went flying, honey," I answered, and looked at the clock. The whole incident had passed in exactly thirteen minutes! If I had not the evidence of my own eyes I should never believe it.

Finally the excitement subsided. The crowd gradually dispersed. Ernie, in a quelled and chastened frame of mind, her hand clasped tight in mother's, returned.

They brought sad news of the flying-machine. It seems that while the policemen and hook-and-ladder crew still stood discussing the best method of bringing it down,—perhaps some three minutes after my departure from the scene,—the motor again started up, the car took a last fatal leap backward, and fell two stories to the street,—where it was shattered into so much kindling

wood. Which goes to show just how much we have to be thankful for!

“Oh dear!” grieved Ernie, plaintively. “Who could have suspected our surprise would turn out so! Where’s Geoffrey? Has anybody seen him?”

It appeared upon investigation that Geof had been to the basement-door to inquire “if all were well within.” He was very white and wild-looking, Rose said, and seemed ashamed to come in.

I should have liked it better if he had come and faced mother on the spot; but instead he sneaked off home,—Geof is certainly a queer fellow in some ways,—and that evening confessed the whole affair to Uncle George, asking for money to pay whatever damages we are responsible for, and legal protection for himself and Ernie. For he imagined that they were in some way publicly liable, and might be arrested at any moment.

Uncle George was very angry, the more so since any display of inventive activity on Geof-

frey's part is extremely distasteful to him. He called upon mother this morning to acquire further details, and remarked with a flourish of his cane that he had "thrashed Geof soundly."

Uncle George is always primitive, and generally mother disapproves of his methods; but this time she returned, with a flash of her maternal eye, that "it was just what Geoffrey needed." Nevertheless, she herself believes in what might be called "reformatory" punishments. So Ernie took her dinner in bed last night, where she would have plenty of time to think, while *we* answered the questions of the boarders, and Haze interviewed quite a string of enterprising reporters on her behalf! He really managed rather well, I fancy, and finally convinced them that there was not much of a "story."

The matter, however, did not end there for Ernie; for this afternoon when she came home from school mother called her into the nursery, and pointing to the pretty plaid dress on which

she had been working when the excitement began, remarked,—

“My dear, since you are so anxious to be helpful I shall let you finish your dress yourself. The material is cut, and the lining basted. I will give whatever directions you may need, but dress-making is not nearly so difficult an art as the construction of flying-machines. Besides, if you are busy with your needle, I shall not worry about you.”

Poor Ernie! her face was a study. She simply hates sewing. “It makes her toes prick,” she says. Also, it will mean giving up all her play-time for weeks to come, and she must be careful and not botch, since she will have to wear the result of her labours.

On the whole, I think her punishment was even more severe than Geoffrey’s. But neither of the culprits complains. Rather they *glide* about the house in such a beatific state of Christian humility that one knows it cannot last.

"I don't believe in hitting a fellow when he's down," remarked Haze to me this evening. "But I'm glad they realise what they've done. Apart from the frightful publicity of the thing, I *miss the flying-machine*. There is nothing to keep the draughts off my head at night, and the workshop is not what it was!"

Thursday, December 11.

THIS afternoon mother called on Mrs. Burroughs. She is the lady whose house Ernie broke into with the flying-machine, and I forgot to say how lovely she was about it. "Surprised, of course," as Ernie admitted, "but *so* pleasant."

Mother intended calling yesterday, to arrange about the broken glass, etc.,—for which, fortunately, Uncle George said he would pay,—but she was flat, poor dear, with a nervous headache, and so had to put it off. Ernie was rather shaken, too, and Robin quite excited and feverish.

As he continued to have a little "temperature"

this morning, I did not give him his reading lesson till afternoon. He is really getting on very nicely, when one considers the disadvantages against which he has to fight;—not only his ill health, but he has had so many stories read to him, and is so far advanced for his age in other ways, that it is hard for him to read:—"I see a Cat. Does the Cat see me?" If he did not wish to crush Georgie's rising conceit, I think we would have a struggle teaching him.

He said to me to-day when the lesson was over,—"Oh, Ellie, I do hate cats,—all but Rosebud!" and sighed prodigiously. It is amusing to hear Robin sigh. He is such a little boy, and the sigh is so very big. I told him he would make an invaluable passenger aboard a sailing vessel, for, if the wind died down, it would only be necessary for him to sigh once or twice to blow the ship right into port.

This idea tickled him mightily, and he sighed again even louder than before, and then he said he

would tell me a story. I love Bobsie's stories,—they are so original. Here is the one he told this afternoon:

“Once there was a Crusader, and his name was Max, and he lived up a tree in the Holy Land.”

“What sort of a tree, Robin?” I asked.

“It was a nut-tree,” Bobs replied, “and there were chestnuts on it, and hickory-nuts, and peanuts, too. The Crusader and the squirrels what lived with him used to eat them all day long. But one time the squirrels had gone out on a visit, and the Crusader was sitting on a branch alone, and he saw a Griffin go by. And the Griffin was muttering and murmuring to his self, ‘Oh, you wait, my fine lady, till I get home, and then won’t I have you for my tea! Oh! ho! my fine madam, just you wait, and then we’ll see!’ So Max, he knew right away that that meant a Princess; and he slid down the trunk of the tree, an’ he ran right up to him, an’ he shouted in his ear,—

“‘*Where’s* that Princess you have hid?’

“And the Griffin jumped, but then he pretended it was only a burr what he had in his foot, and he said,—

“ ‘Princess? Princess? I haven’t any Princess, my dear fellow. What are you talkin’ about?’

“And just then Max he heard a sobbing sound, which was the Princess weeping, and he shouted,—

“ ‘Oh my! not much you haven’t! I hear her crying this very instant, an’ if you don’t tell me where she is, I shall cut your head slam bang off!’

“But the Griffin he was v-e-r-y clever, and he said, ‘What do you mean, old nosey? Why, that’s only my sick grandmother that you hear. She has an influenza, and so she’s *got* to sniff!’

“But the Crusader was not so easily fooled as all that, and he took up his sword, an’ he cut off the Griffin’s head! bang!! And then he looked around for the Princess, an’ after a while he found

her in a pit what the Griffin had dug. And then the Crusader, and the Princess, and the squirrels all went and lived in the Griffin's castle, 'cause the Princess didn't know how to climb trees, and anyhow Max was tired of nuts."

Just as Bobsie finished his story mother came in from her call, and as we wanted to hear all about it, she took him in her lap in the big rocker, while I seated myself on the hassock at her feet. Mrs. Burroughs, she said, was charming,—so cordial and friendly, and would not listen to anything about "damages." She seemed endlessly amused at Ernie's escapade, and laughed and laughed over it. Then she would break off to apologise, and say she fully realised how great the shock must have been to us;—till some freshly funny aspect of the adventure would strike her, she would laugh again, and mother would laugh, too.

Finally they began to talk of other things.

It seems that Mrs. Burroughs had had a little boy who was an invalid. His name was Francis. He was ill for five years with some spinal trouble, and died when he was seven. Mother told me the sadder details later, for Robin takes his illness so much as a matter of course that we never like to say anything before him that would be apt to make him realise, or arouse apprehensions. Mrs. Burroughs' husband had died some years previous, and so she was left quite alone, except for an aunt, an old lady of nearly seventy, who fortunately was out making calls Tuesday afternoon, and so escaped the excitement of Ernie's invasion.

Mrs. Burroughs then asked mother a number of questions about Robin. She said she had often noticed his little pale face at the nursery window as she passed our house, and she wondered if he ever got out. Mother answered that we could not let him go very often this winter, for he took cold so easily, and his crutches seemed to tire him.

Then Mrs. Burroughs flushed a beautiful rose

colour, hesitated, and said, in a breathless little way, that her boy, Francis, had had a wheel-chair for the last couple of years of his illness from which he had gotten a great deal of comfort and pleasure. She had often wondered, seeing Robin at the window, if it would not be nice for him, too. Half a dozen times, she said, she had been on the point of sending it over.

“And it shall come to him this evening. I don’t know what has held me back so long! You will let your dear little son accept it as a gift from my Francis, will you not, Mrs. Graham?” she pleaded. “Children have no feeling about taking presents from one another,—and I should be so very, very glad. For Francis always loved to give!”

Of course, mother could make but one answer, —and how splendid the chair will be for Robin! Now he can get out on the mild, sunny days, which was impossible for him when he was dependent only on Ernie’s sled. Dear little fellow!

—he is delighted with the prospect, and we have great hopes of the good it will do him.

And how kind of Mrs. Burroughs to think of it, and offer it the way she did,—without any hint of patronage or condescension. She also asked with what mother called “a hungry look” if she might not run in sometime and make Bobbie’s acquaintance, and she invited Ernie and me to call upon her, too. I shall love to go, and even Ernie admits that perhaps it won’t be so bad, since Mrs. Burroughs seems to be “a delicate sort of person” who understands how “others feel.”

Really it is rather pathetic the way Ernie has brightened up since we have had the offer of the chair. I think in her secret heart she considers herself responsible;—a sort of unappreciated *dea ex machina*, as it were. And certainly it is an unlooked for and lovely end to what might have proven a very terrible adventure.

Saturday, December 13.

THE sun shone bright and beautiful this morning, there was no wind, and the streets were clear of snow, so Bobsie went for a ride in his new wheel-chair. What do you think he wore? The dearest little fur-lined overcoat, and a fur cap with a military cockade, almost the exact duplicate of those belonging to Georgie which I was mean enough to envy the last time he came to see us!

This is the way it happened. The wheel-chair did not come from Mrs. Burroughs Thursday evening as we had hoped. Robin kept watching for it, and listening for the bell. I waited, too, but all in vain. I don't know which of us went to bed the more disappointed. The next day, Friday, it rained. Robin could not have gone out under any circumstances,—but it was not until late in the afternoon, after hours of waiting, that the chair finally arrived.

It was left at the basement door by Mrs. Bur-

roughs' maid with a big bundle and a little note. Mother read the note, while I undid the bundle, cutting all the strings, you may be sure, and wondering what it might contain. Inside the wrapping paper there was a dear little steamer rug;—such a pretty, serviceable plaid, and warm as warm can be. Then came the overcoat, the fur cap with close ear-laps, just such as they are wearing this winter, and a charming pair of fur-lined gloves! But,—could we accept so much?

“Listen, Bobs,” said mother, and read the note aloud:

“MY DEAR ROBIN:—

“The wheel-chair which I am sending, and the coat and cap, belonged to a little boy whom I wish you might have known and loved. His name was Francis. If you had known him, you could not have helped loving him, I am sure. He was sick a great deal of the time, like you, and always so patient and good. Your mother tells me that you are good, too, and that is why I want you to have his things. I had to alter the coat and cap a little, or you would have had them before this, for my Francis always liked his clothes just so,—in the very latest style. Perhaps you feel that way, too! Please wear them,—and I hope

you will enjoy the chair very much. It will make me happier to know that another little boy is making use of my boy's things.

"With love to your mother and yourself, believe me,
"Your friend,
"CLARA CECILIA BURROUGHS."

Now was not that a lovely note?

"Will you take the things, Bobsie dear?" said mother.

"Course I will," answered Bobs with a sympathetic sniff. He had felt the sadness underlying the gentle words, and stood quite grave and serious as we tried on the coat and gloves. They fitted as if they had been made for him, and how charming our Robin looked!

"I'll have to be very good when I wear these," he remarked, quaintly:—but, alas, for resolutions!

As I said, we took our first walk this morning, and Robin was so comfortable in his new chair with the steamer rug tucked close about his little thin legs! The street was full of his "friends,"

and Bobs beamed on them with gracious condescension. A pretty glow of excitement burned in his cheeks; his eyes were bright as stars; he did not look like a little invalid boy.

"People will think I am riding just because I am so Rich," he remarked, looking down at his fur-lined gloves;—and that moment turning the corner of Washington Square, whom should we meet but Georgie and his nurse, out for a morning stroll, too.

"Hello!" says Georgie, his eyes nearly popping out of his head with amazement,—“Where'd you get those things?” For, naturally, he had never seen Bobs attired so gorgeously before.

"Boy gave 'em to me," answered Robin, loftily.

"What boy?" questioned Georgie. And then before Robin had time to reply,—“Pooh! I wouldn't take coats an' things from anybody, 'cept just my papa. I'd be ashamed to wear other people's clothes!”

"No, you wouldn't! Not the way I do!" shouted Robin, with flashing eyes. "This coat belongs to an Angel, I'd like to have you know! And nobody'd let you wear it,—you're too bad!"

"Robin! Robin!" I cried. "What would Francis think if he could hear you now?"

Robin instantly subsided; and, indeed, it was not necessary for him to say more. Georgie was quite quelled and done for. The idea of the Angel coat was more than he could grapple with. He walked along beside the chair in a state of wondering, but subdued, solemnity.

After a while he began timidly to stroke the fur on Robin's cuff.

"Is it warm?" he asked.

"Yes, it is," answered Robin, still a trifle defiant.

"Suppose you tell Georgie about the things," I said,—for Robin was clever enough to appreciate that the impression he had created, though

delightful to his vanity, was not strictly in accordance with fact.

"Well," he muttered, unwillingly, "Francis is an angel now, and this was his coat. And I'm sick like he was, and good, too, and that's why I needn't be ashamed to wear it."

"So long as you *stay* good," I answered.

And Robin blushed and hung his head, while Georgie sighed. He did not entirely understand, even yet, but somehow the tension of his prosaic little mind was relieved.

Nevertheless, he was very respectful and polite to Robin all the rest of the walk, and the explanation must have set him thinking, I suppose, for this afternoon while Bobs was upstairs taking a nap, who should appear at our door but Georgie, this time under the care of William, the coloured butler.

"Here," he said, handing me a square package, prettily done up with tissue paper and red ribbon. "This is for Bobbie, because he is sick. Tell him

it's the one with the picture of the tiger. He likes that best, but I like the Brownie Books."

"Oh, thank you, Georgie dear," I said, kissing his little ruddy face. "What made you think to bring it over?"

"I wanted him to have something to 'muse himself with," said Georgie, "and mamma said I might, if only I would stop teasing."

"It was very kind of you, honey," I answered, and Georgie beamed.

Sometimes I am ready to admit that I am unjust to Georgie. It isn't his fault that he has all the things I want for Robin, to be sure.

And now I must write something that I dread to put down in black and white;—but there is no use shirking. We have to face it. The Hancocks are going! The news came quite unexpectedly to us all, and it is nobody's fault.

Mrs. Hancock saw mother this evening, and explained that Mr. Hancock's married sister had come to the city and taken a furnished house, and

it had always been understood between them that when this happened she and Mr. Hancock would rent a floor. She said she was really sorry to leave us, that she had no complaints to make; but they were anxious to be settled before Christmas, and felt obliged to give up their rooms next Saturday. That would give us a whole week in which to rent them, and she hoped we would have no trouble.

But, oh dear! we haven't even had any applications for Mrs. Hudson's room yet. It seems to be an unlucky season, or something, and when the Hancocks go, I don't see how we are going to get on at all!

We will have only Miss Brown left, and she pays less than anybody else because her room is so small. Can a family of seven people live on ten dollars a week? That sounds like a problem in a *Lady's Magazine*; but I fancy the answer will prove very different from those printed, if we are unlucky enough to have to try it.

"I have such a queer feeling whenever I look at Miss Brown," confessed Ernie, as we put away the dinner dishes,—Rose having begged for an unexpected afternoon out. "Sort of as if we were a Cannibal family, and she was the last captive we had left. Just think, she means mutton-chops, and beefsteak, and milk for Robin, and butter, and eggs, and everything except rent! We must guard her carefully, Elizabeth, and see to it that she does not escape!"

Poor Miss Brown! I had had somewhat the same feeling myself, though I would not have thought of expressing it in exactly Ernie's words.

I think mother must have guessed from our faces how worried we were, for, as soon as the dishes were finished, she sat down at the piano and began to play the jolliest lot of college airs. And soon we were all singing and laughing; to hear us you wouldn't have thought we had a care in the world. Certainly, for a time we forgot

we had! Even Haze shut up his Cæsar, and joined in the frolic.

Now wasn't that exactly like mother,—and no one but her?

"We'll think it out together, Elizabeth," she whispered, as I bade her good-night. "Don't worry, dear."

Monday, December 15.

MOTHER and I have had our consultation, and we feel better. It was rather like a general and his adjutant preparing for a siege. First, we mustered our resources,—the house; so much coal in the cellar, furnace, and range; Miss Brown's seven dollars a week, Hazard's three: next, the demands that were to be met,—lighting (always an expensive item at this season of the year); milk for Robin; and the table expenses generally.

"The first thing to be done is to dispense with Rose," said mother, pencil on lip. "Apart from the question of wages, she eats a great deal!"

At this we could not help laughing. The parsimonious picture presented was certainly ludicrous;—but, on an income of ten dollars a week, every potato counts, and Rose has never been either efficient or economical. We have kept her for her cheapness and general good temper. She has washed the dishes, cooked, after a fashion, and attended a *great* many funerals,—apparently the more the merrier.

“It’s ma cousin’s step-brudder’s lil’ boy, dis time, Mis’ Graham,” she explained to mother, Saturday afternoon. “That ain’ no very close kin, ’cordin’ to some folks’ way ob reckonin’, Ah know. But Ah’m one o’ them that believes in keepin’ up the dispectability ob the fambly tie. C’n Ah go?”

Of course, mother answered that she might, and consequently Ernie and I washed the dinner dishes. So, though perhaps Rose will be sorry to leave us, since she once confessed to Robin in an unconsidered burst of confidence, she con-

siders us "a right sma't fambly to do fer," we cannot feel that she will be much of a loss; and, as we know she can get a place any time she wants it with her sister "at a swell boar'ding house in the fash'nable distric's," we are relieved of responsibility on that score.

So now it is settled;—and after next Saturday when the Hancocks leave we are to do everything ourselves, washing, cooking, sweeping, and all. I can't say that I look forward to the experiment with any particular "thrill," but mother is great to work with, and somehow we'll pull through.

"Perhaps you will be willing to admit by this time, Elizabeth," remarked Haze this evening, looking up from *Treasure Island*, "that I was right, and you were wrong. My salary comes in pretty conveniently just at present, eh?"

Certainly, Haze's salary is one of the things we are counting on,—but, for all that, I can't help grieving over him, poor dear. Though he does not utter a word of complaint, I know he realises

more keenly every day the magnitude of the sacrifice he has made. He was not cut out for a business-man and finds it hard to adjust himself to the new conditions.

This very morning he was in trouble, over *Treasure Island*, if you please! Ernie got the book from the public library Saturday, expecting to read it herself; but, unfortunately, when she went to Sunday-school yesterday afternoon, she left it lying open on the workshop table. Haze strolled in, carelessly picked it up, and began to read. Naturally, when Ernie came home a couple of hours later, she demanded her story,—but pleadings and protestations were of no avail. Hazard would not even answer,—apparently he was deaf to all remarks. So Ernie lost patience, at last, and tried to snatch the book away; at which Haze rose, dazed yet dignified, placed it on his chair, and calmly sat down on it.

“I think you’re too mean for anything,” cried Ernie, with flashing eyes. “You haven’t any

right to take my story and keep it from me, just because you are stronger than I am!"

"Don't be a dog in the manger," returned Hazard, loftily. "You can't possibly expect to read the thing while I'm sitting on it, can you? Go away and find something useful to do. You're only wasting both our time here, and naturally, when I've finished it, I'll give it back."

Ernie stamped and fumed, quite unable to appreciate the fine logic of this position; but Haze sat stolidly on, till at last she gave in,—she is always a generous child,—and Hazard arose, resumed his story, and read rabidly till bedtime. Even so, however, he did not finish the book, and took it with him this morning to read on the trolley;—in consequence of which he was carried seven blocks out of his way, and arrived a quarter of an hour late at the office!

Mr. Bridges, who is something of a disciplinarian and determined to show no partiality, "jumped on him like anything" he confessed to

Ernie and me this evening,—“And, of course,” says Haze, “though I objected to the language he used, I was not in a position to resent it,—which comes of being an office boy!”

“Never mind,” purred nice little Ernie, immediately forgetful of any rancour she herself may have been cherishing. “Some day you’ll surprise them all, Hazard. They don’t appreciate you yet, dear,—but we know, don’t we, Elizabeth? Just let ’em wait a bit, and they’ll see!”

Thursday, December 18.

TUESDAY I received an invitation from Aunt Adelaide to dine with them yesterday evening. I was to bring my mandolin, and after dinner Meta and I were to play from *Iolanthe*. The fairy music is very pretty on the mandolin.

There were to be a number of guests: an Englishman and his wife, a railroad president, and

several others. Aunt Adelaide extends me one or two such informal invitations each winter. I expect she considers it her duty,—besides which it lends support to Meta, and two mandolins are better than one.

Naturally, the first question was as to clothes. Aunt Adelaide sees to it that two or three of Meta's last season's dresses are sent to me spring and fall. They are always *chic*, always pretty, and as we are very nearly of a size, they require little alteration. Yet, somehow, I hate to wear them,—especially in their native habitat, where I am perpetually haunted by the discomforting suggestion that they must be fatally familiar to all. However, it is expected; and Ernie declares that I ought to be grateful, since I am thus “provided with a wardrobe far above my station.”

She is too young to understand that that is just what I do not like. Last evening I wore a graceful little white surah frilled frock, garnished with artificial forget-me-nots. The idea! for a

girl who expects to start in on the family-wash come Monday.

Uncle George's house, as I have remarked before, is very imposing. There is a magnificent display of plate-glass windows, a flight of broad stone steps, and a really oppressive vestibule.

I was admitted by William, the coloured man, who took my instrument, and told me that "Miss Meta was above stairs; would I please go right up?"

Such a charming room as Meta has,—all rose and mossy green, with soft rugs, a desk, a book-case, her favourite casts and photographs! Everything individual and personal,—which seems to me the greatest treat of all.

"Come in!" she answered to my knock, and turned half round before the cheval-glass, a pout upon her pretty face.

"Oh, Meta!" I cried, "how charming!" For the dress of which she was evidently trying the effect before the mirror was truly lovely,—a Nile

green rajah silk, with lace under-sleeves and a touch of amber fluff at the throat.

"Do you think so?" returned Meta, "You haven't really seen it yet. Come and look how this shoulder pulls. Now wouldn't that jar you!"

"There isn't much amiss," I answered. "The underseam wants to be let out a little, that's all."

"I declare I'll give Miss Murray fits," returned Meta, her face flushing unpleasantly. "It was all I could do to get her to promise the thing for to-night, and then to send it home like this! She's a big fake,—forever working on mamma's sympathies with that cough of hers! I'm going to change, Elizabeth, see if I don't! All the girls are going to Madam Delahasset, now; and I don't see why I should be made to look like a frump, just because Miss Murray is delicate, and has a pair of aged parents to support!"

"You're exaggerating, Meta," I returned. "There is nothing the least frumpish about that

frock. It's the prettiest thing I have seen in ages,—and as to the shoulder, that's easily remedied, and might have happened with any one."

"Do you really think so?" asked Meta, uncertainly.

"Why, of course I do," I replied. "And what is more, I think Miss Murray is a wonder—always so *chic* and original."

"Well, I'm glad you like it," admitted Meta, who is not difficult to bring around if only one is firm enough. "Mamma believes in her; but there is nothing that upsets me so much as a new frock. See,—won't my amber buckle be the very ticket with this girdle?"

"It's stunning," I returned, and threw my hat and gloves upon the bed.

"You look well yourself, Elizabeth," continued Meta, turning, jewel-case in hand, to sweep me an approving glance. "Somehow, I never appreciate how nice my things are till I see them on

you. Those bunches of forget-me-nots, for instance, didn't look half so cute when I wore them. But, mercy, child—what have you been doing with your hands?"

"Dish-washing," I was forced to admit. "Are they very bad?"

"H'm'm," returned Meta, in dubious assent. "It wouldn't matter so much if we didn't have to play. Don't you ever use cold cream?" And then, quickly, before I had time to reply,—

"How can you bear it, Elizabeth?—truly, now, —your life, I mean?"

"My life?" I questioned. "You want me to answer honestly? Well, first place, it's interesting; one never has a moment to be bored. Of course, there are plenty of worries, and a good deal happens that one doesn't like; but the planning is exciting, and the sense of battle. Then, too, there are such lots of *funny* things! I'm convinced that nothing develops one's sense of humour like being poor,—and it teaches one to

love one's family, and gives one plenty of chance to show it, too, without being sentimental; and, oh,—it's good training in other ways. For instance, it would take a lot more than a new frock to upset me, Meta, and——”

Here I stopped, amazed. Either it was pride that made me answer so, or I had suddenly discovered that being poor is not altogether such bad luck! I, who have kicked so determinedly against the pricks;—longing for the luxuries we can't afford;—resentful of Georgie because for him they are afforded. Well, I must do better now. Since, among the thorns, there are roses to be found, why not pluck and wear them?

Meta still stood before the mirror, trying the effect of the amber buckle.

“I don't understand a word you've been saying,” she confessed. “I'm afraid you're talking through your hat, Elizabeth. But, come on. Let's go down now—I'm ready, since you think my rags will do.”

And we proceeded to the drawing-room, where we found Aunt Adelaide and a number of guests already assembled.

Geof did not appear till dinner was announced. He sat next me, and after an unenthusiastic greeting began upon the oysters. It was evident he was in one of his moods.

"How's hockey coming on, Geof?" I asked, under cover of the general conversation.

"It's not coming on at all," returned Geof, glumly. "Probably shan't play any more this season."

"What!" I replied, for Geof is captain of his school team, a crack player, fast, and wonderfully clever. "Not even the Lakeville match? I thought you had it all arranged!"

"So we have," muttered Geof, crumbling a bit of bread between his fingers. "The match 'll come off, all right;—under a different captain, that's all."

"Oh, Geoffrey!" I said; for I saw by his face

and the nervous movements of his hand how deeply the matter cut. "What has happened? You're not in trouble again at school?"

"I'd get on all right at school," returned Geof, sullenly, "if only they'd stop nagging at home. It seems the Governor's not pleased with my reports,—one can't especially blame him for that,—and the ultimatum's gone forth that I am to give up athletics,—my place on the team and all. He's put up to it, of course. I'm sharp enough to know that."

"But, Geoffrey," I said, "if scholarship is the only difficulty, why don't you buckle down and study? Aunt Adelaide is really anxious about you. Her motives are good,—and, after all, the matter rests in your own hands,—it isn't hockey, as *hockey*, that is objected to. You know that."

Geof turned from me. I saw that I would receive no further answer; and yet I felt sorry for the poor fellow, stubborn and headstrong as I know him to be.

When we returned to the drawing-room, Meta, Geof, and I retired to a window-recess, where we felt ourselves screened from observation.

"Mamma's evenings are so dull," Meta began, plaintively. "One puts on one's best clothes, and then nothing happens at all! Seventeen is a hateful age anyway, it seems to me. One is not grown up, and yet one is no longer a kid. Fancy, Elizabeth! mamma says I am not to come out till I am twenty! Did you ever hear anything so unjust? All this talk about education makes me tired."

"*Much* you have to complain of," jeered Geof;—"a fudge party every other week, and girls so thick about the house one can't move without stepping on 'em!"

"Oh, I'm not trying to infringe your patent," replied Meta, smartly. "Did you know, Elizabeth, that Geof has taken out a patent on martyrdom, since he's been forbidden athletics? He has

even got to give up his beloved hockey. It's a national misfortune, let me tell you."

"That's all you know about it," returned Geof. "But who'd expect you to understand, anyhow? You haven't an atom of sport in your make-up!"

He raised an excited arm as he spoke, and as ill luck would have it struck Meta rather sharply on the side of the head. I should have laughed had I been in her place, for it was not really much of a blow, and we were crowded so against the window-seat that accidents were only natural. But she cried out,—

"Geof! stop that! You hurt me!"

And Uncle George, who was standing near enough to overhear the exclamation, turned and rumbled in that heavy bass of his,—“Are you teasing your sister, sir? Leave the room;—since you can't conduct yourself like a gentleman.”

Geof jumped up and looked at Meta, as if expecting her to explain; I waited, too; but never a word did she say. Then Geoffrey, very red and

stormy, walked toward the door. How sorry I felt; for every one had turned at Uncle George's voice, and it sounded brutal,—the way one would order a dog.

"Meta!" I whispered; "how could you? It was an accident—you know that perfectly well!"

Meta raised her hand to her hair with an airy little laugh. "He mussed my pompadour, all the same," she explained. "And besides, Geof will understand. He knows perfectly well that I owed him one."

I turned away, shocked and disgusted, and presently Aunt Adelaide asked us to play.

The music went well enough: people applauded, and declared it delightful; but, so far as I was concerned, the evening had proved anything but a success.

About half-past nine I made my *adieux*, and was conducted home under the wing of the dignified and awe-inspiring William.

Well, I had not had a pleasant time, but I think I learned a lesson. Meta's question and my unexpected answer in return. Certainly, there *are* advantages in being poor;—for, under given circumstances, one would have to be so very selfish to be selfish at all, that that in itself is a safeguard.

Poor Geof! poor Meta! I lay awake and thought of them late into the night. They waste so much that is good and pleasant, and are not nearly as happy as any of us, whom they often pity, I feel sure.

Friday, December 19.

THIS morning, as Rose was sweeping the pavement in front of our house, she was accosted by a small boy with ruddy cheeks and a red cap.

"Is he dead?" asked the small boy, his head interrogatively to one side, a half-expectant, half-wistful light in his twinkling blue eyes.

"Dead?" says Rose, with a little skip.
"Who?"

"Why, him," specified the small boy, ungrammatically insistent. "The little chap which used to sit in the winder and watch us play. I haven't seen him for three days."

"Of course he ain't dead," answered Rose, indignantly, for, with all her faults, she is very fond of Robin. "Ah guess he can stay in bed if he wan'ster without askin' you! Shoo! get along!" and she swished viciously at the boy with her broom.

"Then give him this," cried the red-capped one, hopping nimbly to safety in the gutter; and rolled a great golden orange to her feet. "I bought it with my own pennies to eat in school; but I'd rather he had it,—as long as he isn't dead." And he walked whistling down the street.

It was Robin's "chum" John, to be sure,—and how Bobsie *did* enjoy that orange!

"It isn't everybody who has such good friends as me," he remarked with gusto, between unctuous sucks. "There's Mrs. Burroughs, who sends over chairs an' things just when you least expect it; and Francis, who wants me to have 'em (she said I might count him); an' Georgie, even if we do fight sometimes; an' my chum John. It's pleasant to have people love you, isn't it, Ellie dear?—and very comforting, too."

In one instance, certainly, the comfort seems to be mutual. Mrs. Burroughs has run in to see Robin several times this last week. They laugh and chatter away together in the jolliest fashion. Indeed, it is quite delightful to hear them; for Bobs has not a particle of shyness with his new friend, while she seems to find an almost painful pleasure in his society. The more we see her, the sweeter we think her; and there was not a dissenting voice when Ernie declared this evening that "Mrs. Burroughs is next door to an angel."

Saturday, December 20.

ROSE left us this afternoon with many protestations of affectionate regard.—

“If ever you wan’ me, jus’ call upon me, Mis’ Graham,” she said to mother. “Ah’m ready to come back any time, at \$18 a mont’, and no questions arst.”

I must say it seemed rather nice to have the kitchen to ourselves, the closet shelves all tidy and ship-shape, and clean sash curtains in the windows.

I was to get my first dinner alone, for poor little Robin had had a wretched night, and been in so much pain during the day that we had finally decided to send for the doctor. He was expected at any moment, and mother had to be ready to receive him.

The potatoes were bubbling pleasantly away on the hottest part of the stove, the steak was salted and peppered on the gridiron, ready for broiling, and I had just run in to the dining-room to take

a last survey of the table before sitting down to cut up the oranges, when there sounded a *tap-tap* on the window-pane, and looking up, I saw Hazard's anxious face peering in at me.

Naturally I ran to the basement door to let him in.

"Is anything the matter, Haze?" I asked,—for he has a latchkey, and it seemed odd that he should tap at the window.

"Hush, Elizabeth," he answered. "I don't want 'em to know that I'm home just yet." And he preceded me into the dining-room, threw his cap upon a chair, sat despairingly down on it, and buried his head in his arms across the chair-back.

"What has happened, Hazard?" I asked, anxiously.

Haze swallowed hard, looked up, and then let his head drop down on his arm again.

"Do answer me, Haze," I urged. "*What* is the matter? You aren't dismissed, are you?"

"Not this time," returned Haze, unsteadily,

“but, from our point of view, it’s all the same as if I were.” And then, in an ashamed and broken voice, the poor boy started in to tell his story.

It seems that he was sent by Mr. Bridges this morning to collect a small debt for the firm. Haze got the money without any trouble, and started at a clip down the office stairs, because the elevator was several flights up, and he wanted to break the record, so to speak, and accomplish his errand in such short time that Mr. Bridges, whose special hobby is promptitude, would be forced to notice and commend him. When he reached the curb there was no car in sight, and Hazard happened to remember that he had not counted his money. Of course he knew that it must be all right, for the firm he was dealing with is perfectly trustworthy and reputable. However, to make sure, Haze thrust his hand into his coat pocket, drew out the little wad of bills, and proceeded to verify them.—There were two tens, a two, and

three ones, in all twenty-five dollars, which was the correct sum.

Haze stood with the money in his hand, thinking how nice it would be to have that amount to spend on Christmas, till presently a down-town car came bowling along, Haze thrust the bills hurriedly into the outside pocket of his overcoat, and swung on.

There was a fine-looking, white-bearded old gentleman standing on the back platform. He caught Haze by the arm, and steadied him.

"Young blood will have its way," he remarked, in admiring reproof. "Some forty years ago I swung aboard the cars in just such style myself."

"Thank you, sir. That's all right," says Haze, never stopping to think that it must have been stage coaches the old gentleman swung aboard.

"Pleasant weather," remarked Hazard's new friend, presently. "Crisp, but not too keen. I see you are like myself, and prefer the view from the back platform here, to the stuffy atmosphere

within. Oh, the poetry of a great city!" he observed again. "There's romance here as fine and true as any hid away amid the snowcapped hills and sheltered valleys of my native state. Judging from your physiognomy, my boy, you are of the fibre to appreciate all that. The brow of a scholar, above the ardent eyes of a poet!"

"Thank you, sir," says Hazey again, blushing a bit, and thinking, I haven't a doubt, what a nice, appreciative old gentleman he had run across. "I do like to watch the city, and listen to its hum. It's like wheels within a wheel. If you can keep your place, and pace, all right;—otherwise——"

"Otherwise," concluded the old gentleman, his eyes fixed abstractedly upon the guard, who had walked the length of the car, and was fumbling with the door handle,—“Otherwise, it is what one might call—*bum!*”

And then, much to the surprise of Hazard, he hopped lightly to the step, swung himself off the

car with a really amazing agility for one of his years, and disappeared among the throng.

Haze was still staring blankly after him when he felt a touch upon his shoulder. "Fare, please," said the guard.

Haze felt in his overcoat pocket for the nickel, and turned pale. The wad of bills was gone! He had been robbed.

"And the worst of it is," added Hazard, "that I shall have to make good out of my salary. That means I won't be able to pay another cent to the family for eight weeks, Elizabeth. And I'd planned what I was going to give you all for Christmas,—and—and Mr. Bridges called me a *calf* before the entire office! I can stand most things," concluded poor Hazey, with an angry sort of gulp, "but not, *not* an 'ninsult!'"

Of course I comforted him as well as I could, and told him I would break the matter to mother. But, oh! it took all my courage, I can tell you, when she came down a few moments later, white-

faced, and so tired-looking, after her interview with the doctor.

There was no use waiting, however, till after dinner. We should have to wash the dishes then, and she would want to return to Robin. So I began as cheerfully as I could, and mother listened, half as if she had expected it.

“Who could ever suppose that three dollars a week would seem so much?” she said, at last. “Well, we can’t have any Christmas spree, that’s all. I’m sorry, dears, but I do not dare draw anything from the bank. There is only \$300 left,—and we may need it all, later.”

Somehow, in the back of my brain I have half a suspicion what mother fears we may need that money for. But I am not going to ask her and make sure. I haven’t the courage, that’s all.

“*Mother!*” protested Ernie, who had come down to the kitchen in time to hear mother’s last words. “No Christmas spree! What will Robin think?”

"There, there," said mother, almost harshly. "It can't be helped, Ernestine. Get the blue dish for the potatoes, and then ring the gong. We mustn't keep Miss Brown waiting."

So dinner was served; but though Miss Brown was really very nice, and said that everything was "delicious," and she thought we should find the new régime a real improvement on the old, I could not feel much pleasure in her praise.

"Shall I tell you something?" asked Ernie, unexpectedly, as she set a dish of milk for Rosebud on the hearth, after the table was cleared and Miss Brown had gone upstairs. "Well, Uncle George is a devil. There!"

"Ernie," said mother, turning in the doorway with Robin's tray, which she was about to carry to the nursery, "I don't wish you to speak that way. It is not right. Uncle George has been a good friend to us, according to his lights, and in this instance the fault is entirely with Hazard. He was foolish and careless, and we cannot expect

an exception to be made in his case. It was against my wishes that he took a position,—now it lies with himself to make the best of it, and to try to overcome those faults of character which prevent his being the comfort and support to me that I have a right to expect.”

Poor Hazey, who was helping dry the dishes, blushed to the roots of his hair, and dropped a cup and smashed it.

Oh, dear! I do feel so sorry for *everybody*! That big splash is a tear;—and to-night there just *don't* seem to be any roses, so there!

Monday, December 22.

ALL last night the wind whistled and howled about the house. This morning we woke to a snowstorm of almost blizzard proportions. And, oh, but the atmosphere was arctic!

“You get up first,” says Ernie, poking her little pink nose above the bed-covers.

"Indeed, I'll do nothing of the sort," I answered. "It's *your* turn."

"I thought you loved me, Elizabeth!" wailed Ernestine, reproachfully.

"So I do," I answered, and hopped heroically forth to the glacial matting.

Ernie followed with hysterical giggles,—and I can tell you it did not take us long to dress!

Fortunately Miss Brown had gone to spend Sunday with a niece in Flatbush, so we did not have her to worry about. Mother made the nursery as comfortable as possible at the sacrifice of heavy inroads upon our precious stock of coal, and there Haze, Ernie, Robin, and I passed the morning. For Haze was taken ill Sunday night with a sharp attack of laryngitis, and was still unfit for the office; and we did not think it wise for Ernie to attempt to make her way to school through the snowdrifts. But, though it is not often now that we have the chance of a day together, it was not especially jolly.

Poor Hazey squatted on the register, very hoarse and gloomy, pegging away at his eternal Cæsar; I darned stockings, and understood just how it was that Rose had used to be cross on a stormy Monday; while Ernie, hid in a corner behind a series of screens that she had contrived, sang carols and asked ridiculous riddles, busy as she declared upon "a secret."

As for Robin, he sat in his shabby little grey flannel dressing-gown, propped up with pillows in the middle of mother's big bed, talking about Santa Claus and the things he wanted for Christmas.—

"I've been good for three weeks," he boasted vaingloriously. "I've taken my cod-liver oil,—haven't I, Elizabeth? And I've finished the First Reader, and learned to spell *squirrel*! Hope old Santa knows about it, 'cause I want a lot o' things!"

"Why don't you write a letter, and tell him what you want?" suggested Ernie.

Whereat, Hazard scowled at her over his Cæsar, and I shook my head warningly; but it was already too late. Robin caught gleefully at the suggestion.

"I will," he piped. "Bring me some paper and a pencil, Elizabeth. Hurry up, now, honey!" For Bobsie dearly loves to write letters, and the fact that no one can read them but himself does not dampen his enthusiasm in the least.

"What is the difference," sang out Ernie, blithely, while I searched mother's desk for a half-sheet of note paper, "between a horse and an egg?"

"There's no difference between you and a donkey," growled Hazard.

"Well, I like that!" retorted Ernestine; while Robin, after a vigorous suck at the stump of pencil I had handed him, began unctuously upon his letter.

"*Dear Santa Claus,*" he muttered,—

"*I want the Mowgli books,—*"

"Jungle Books," corrected Ernie.

"—and a horse just like Georgie's," continued Robin, with a flourish.

"Why not a little, white, cuddly, flannel rabbit with pink eyes?" suggested Ernestine. "You could take that to bed with you, you know, Robin, and the horse would have to sleep in a stall in the closet, which wouldn't be nearly so convenient!"

"Yes, *a little white flannel rabbit with pink eyes,"* corrected Robin, obligingly. *"And a steamboat what can whistle, and a box of building blocks, an'——"*

But here Haze slammed to his book.

"Shut up, Bobs," he commanded, roughly. "What's the good? There isn't any Santa Claus, and you might just as well know it now, as——" but there he stopped; for Robin was staring at him with such round frightened eyes that Ernie and I cried out together,—

"Oh, Hazard! how can you! You ought to be ashamed!"

Haze opened his book again. "I don't care," he muttered. "There isn't any use in his running on like that. He isn't going to get anything; we all know it, and——"

But Bobsie cried, "I will, too! I've taken my cod-liver oil, I tell you!"

And Ernie, running to his side, flung her arms protectingly about him. "Of course you have, honey," she crooned, "and of course you'll get some presents! Hazard is only teasing. The idea of there not being any Santa Claus! Who gave you your things last year, I'd like to know?"

Robin's chin was beginning to quiver, and two great teardrops blinked on the ends of his long lashes. He held his arms tight about Ernie's neck, and cuddled up against her side.

Haze looked at them a moment, threw his book aside, and strode from the room, I following.

"Hazard!" I began, as soon as the door had shut upon us. "It was cruel! How could you do such a thing?"

"Don't bother!" answered Haze, gruffly. "I didn't intend to say it that way, but—Robin *isn't* going to get anything. I couldn't bear to have him go on like that, and know it was all my fault, and,—oh, let me alone, Elizabeth!"

And, shaking my hand from his arm, he turned and bolted upstairs, where I heard the workshop door slam to behind him.

Naturally, if the rest of the house is cold, you can imagine what it must be in the workshop. I was very much afraid that Hazard would add to his sore throat; but I knew it would do no good to speak to him just then, so I returned to the nursery, where Ernie was still sitting on the side of the bed, her arms close about Robin, whispering to him in the most seductive of tones.

"Yes, he looked just like the pictures, Bobsie," she was saying. "It was in front of Macy's that we met, and I think he must have been looking about at the toys. I was very much sur-

prised, of course; but I went right up to him, and said,—‘How do you do, Mr. Santa Claus? I’m Robin Graham’s sister.’ ”

“Did you, Ernie!” cried Robin, with shining eyes. “And what did he say?”

“I can’t tell you that,” returned Ernie, mysteriously, “because it is a secret. But don’t you worry, honey; *everything is going to be all right!*”

Here I thought it time to interfere; for, though Hazard had been hasty and even unkind in the way he spoke, still we all knew that Robin was not going to get anything for Christmas,—so what was the use of comforting him with false hopes that could only lead to a still more bitter disappointment?

“Run down and set the table, Ernie,” I said, a little dryly. “It’s time for Robin to have his reading lesson, now.”

Bobsie looked at me half shyly under his dark lashes.

"I have a Secret," he said, and gave Ernie a long kiss before he let her go.

After luncheon, while we were washing the dishes, I asked Ernestine what she meant by talking to Robin so. "There is no good in deceiving him," I said. "Of course, Hazard did not set about it in the right way, but sooner or later he will have to be told. He isn't going to get anything. You heard what mother said."

Ernie looked at me in blank amazement. "Why, Elizabeth!" she cried.

"Ernestine," I returned, "remember,—you are nearly thirteen years old! Do you believe in Santa Claus, too?"

Ernie laughed and flapped her dish towel. "Of course I do," she answered, "after my own fashion. You and Hazard are too silly! Mother didn't mean, I suppose, that she was going to take away all the presents that come to the house for Robin, and burn them? She only meant that we couldn't spend any money. What's to pre-

vent Aunt Adelaide giving him something as she always does, I'd like to know? and Georgie? and Geof?" Here Ernie began to two-step to the cupboard with a pile of plates. "Oh, Elizabeth," she chortled, "he says I can help him choose 'em! Robin will be simply *delighted*! He has never had anything so stunning in all his life! But there,"—Ernie rattled the plates perilously down on the cupboard shelf. "It's a secret. I promised I wouldn't breathe a word! And I know another that Miss Brown told me, and *another* with Mrs. Burroughs! Hazard is a grumpy goose. Why can't he think of something to give Bobsie, the way I'm doing,—it needn't cost, you know,—instead of being so huffy and remorseful about a Past that can't be Helped?"

Now wasn't that exactly like Ernie? Christmas is her birthday, and she seems to have the very spirit in her veins. If we were wrecked upon a desert island, I believe she would still find some appropriate way to celebrate.

"So *that* is what you were busy about behind your screen?" I cried.

"Of course," says Ernie. "What did you think? You must make something, too, Elizabeth, and I know mother will; and the letter was just a blind to get Robin to believe he wanted the things we can afford to give him. I thought you and Hazard would understand.—And even if we are poor, so long as we love one another and keep jolly, what's the odds?"

"Ernie," I answered, "you are a darling. *There aren't any!*"

So then we sought an interview with Hazard to explain how matters stood.

"All right," he answered, none too enthusiastic just at first. "I'll try,—but it's different with you girls. I can't make anything, you see,—little fol-de-rols out of sawdust and gold paper. And everything I've saved must go for car fare and expenses these next few weeks. Honestly, I haven't a cent to call my own, except my lucky

penny of 1865, the year Lincoln was shot. And perhaps I've lost that." He searched his pockets. "No,—here it is."

"Hand it over," says Ernie. "I know you'll think the best luck you can possibly have just now is to buy a nice Christmas present for Robin. I'll do your shopping this year, Hazey, and I'll promise to get something Bobs will really like, too. Cheer up, children! No Santa Claus, indeed! I'm ashamed of you."

Friday, December 26.

CHRISTMAS has come and gone, and in spite of our gloomy expectations we have had the jolliest time. You would hardly believe it! Oh,—there were plenty of roses!

The first nice thing that happened was on Tuesday morning when mother received a letter from Miss Brown, stating that she had been asked to stay over the holidays with her niece in Flatbush.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" carolled Ernie:

"Shout the glad tidings, exultantly sing,
Jerusalem triumphs, Messiah is king!"

She did not mean anything the least irreligious. It was simply a spontaneous outburst of joy; and at the same instant a mad enthusiasm seemed to seize hold of us all.

"Let's finish the breakfast dishes at once, Elizabeth," said mother. "I have some sewing upstairs that I *must* attend to."

"And there is 'something I must finish, too,'" answered I. "How considerate of Miss Brown's niece! Just think, our Christmas dinner alone!"

"*Have* you decided—*how* you are going—to spend my *lucky penny*?" shouted Hazard from the hall above. "You understand, Ernie,—I want it to go—*as far as possible*!"

"Yes! yes!" answered Ernie. "I've a grand idea! Don't you worry, Hazard. Geof and I are going shopping this afternoon after school."

And so they did, and so did mother, and so did

I! It was really amusing. Nobody could be prevailed upon to tell what had been bought, except that "it was very cheap, dear. Don't worry!"

Then in the evening Ernie and I made old-fashioned molasses candy, because it is less expensive than fudge and we had determined to pull it and twist it into original shapes, something individual for each one. For Robin we made a little yellow bird (I must confess it looked more like a chicken than anything else), a boy with a big hat and a crooked nose, and a pig with a curly tail. Hazard's candy we put peanuts in, and did not pull, because he prefers it that way. Mother's we tied into a variety of charming bow-knots; and Ernie made me a mandolin, and Geof a hockey stick, while I made Ernie a Santa Claus. He was a little wobbly in the legs, to be sure, but any one could recognise him from his pack.

In the middle of it all Mrs. Burroughs came over, full of her own plans.

"I do hope you won't say no, Mrs. Graham," she pleaded. "I haven't had any Christmas fun—for ages!"

It seems that she wished to give a party for Robin. "I will have it Wednesday night, Christmas eve," she explained. "So it needn't interfere with your family celebration in the least. May I, *please?*"

"Why, it would be lovely," we all answered with enthusiasm. And Mrs. Burroughs flushed a beautiful rose colour, and for a moment the quick tears stood in her eyes.

"Thank you so much," she answered. "Then that's settled. You see Francis and I used to have such good times, and just the last year I got him a magic lantern. It is really a very nice one, and there are some charming slides. '*The Night before Christmas*' is the set Francis liked best,—especially the pictures of the reindeer. I thought we might give it for Robin, and perhaps you will lend your back parlour for the occasion. We can

begin early,—say half-past seven. I wonder if Hazard will consent to act as manager?”

“You’d better choose Geof,” warned Ernie. “He’s cleverer at that sort of thing, and I’m sure he’d like to come.”

So the matter was arranged. The following afternoon,—to the intense excitement of Robin,—Mrs. Burroughs, Geof, and Ernie shut themselves up in the back parlour, from whence began to issue the sound of much laughter and hammering.

Despite his impatience, it was not till quarter to seven o’clock that the doors were finally thrown open and Robin was carried down. How charming everything looked, to be sure! Long loops of ground-pine were festooned about the chandelier, and along the picture-rail. A great artificial Christmas bell hung in the doorway, from either side of which dropped gay streamers of baby-ribbon strung with sleigh-bells, that jingled and sang in the merriest fashion at the

touch of a passing hand. In the window were holly wreaths, and back of the Madonna over the chimney-piece were two more great branches of holly with the biggest, brightest berries I have ever seen. A red Christmas candle burned upon the piano. The old lounge, covered with a tiger rug lent by Mrs. Burroughs, had been pushed out into the middle of the room, and a series of "orchestra chairs" arranged about it. Between the folding doors the magic sheet was hung, and behind it could be heard the voices of Geof and Ernie in animated discussion.

Presently the guests began to arrive,—Georgie and his nurse, Robin's "chum" John, who had been looked up especially for the occasion, because, as Bobs persuasively explained, "it would be pretty odd for a boy to give a party and not ask his own chum"; old Mrs. Endicott, who is Mrs. Burroughs' aunt, and Rosebud, very gay and debonair in a becoming red ribbon bow.

"The audience is ready," sang out Robin, from his lair on the tiger skin. "What makes the party so late, I'd like to know?"

"It isn't late at all," returned Mrs. Burroughs, from behind the curtain. "The idea! we said half-past seven o'clock, and it is only quarter after. You are early! That's all!"

However, in another moment Geof appeared to turn down the lights. With a deep, expectant sigh from Robin, Georgie, and John, the party had begun!

The pictures were certainly charming, and Geoffrey managed the slides without a hitch.

First came "*The Night before Christmas*":—Santa Claus starting out on his journey with a sleigh overladen with toys. How life-like the reindeer looked, to be sure! and how impatient to be off!

"They can go, I bet you!" shouted Georgie, "once Santa takes up the lines."

Next followed a scene among the roof-tops; a

great round moon overhead, and Santa Claus already disappearing down the chimney.

"This can be your house, John," says Robin, magnanimously. "Perhaps he's going to leave that tin trumpet. I don't want it."

"Neither do I," answered John. "I'd rather have a real automobile."

But already the scene had shifted. Santa Claus, upon the hearthrug, was filling stockings with a roguish glance at three little heads buried among the pillows of a great four-poster bed.

How the children laughed and applauded! Next came the stories of *Cinderella*, *Puss in Boots*, and *Hop o' My Thumb*, which were an almost equal success; and, finally, when the last slide was exhausted, the lights were turned up, and what Georgie called "the real party" was brought in. This consisted of ice cream, served in pretty coloured forms of fruits and flowers; lady-fingers; dishes of sugar-plums, and a mild brew of cocoa.

The favours were mechanical toys, such as are sold in quantities along Broadway and Twenty-third Street at this season of the year,—something amusing or interesting for each one. Georgie had a monkey that ran up a stick; Robin a small toy balloon in the shape of a pink rubber pig, that squealed shrilly when blown up; Geof a rooster that could flap its wings and crow; and Ernie a little old woman with a rake and a watering-pot, who, after being properly wound up, would start conscientiously forth to sprinkle her garden, only to trip at the first obstruction she met, and lie kicking her heels frantically on the carpet.

“Oh, it has been a *love-ly* party,” sighed Robin, at last, his arms tight about Mrs. Burroughs’ neck, as he kissed her a sticky but affectionate good-bye. “Thank you so much, and Merry Christmas, dear!”

“God bless you, darling boy,” returned Mrs. Burroughs. “Promise you won’t lie awake

thinking about it, and to-morrow will come all the sooner."

So, with season's greetings, and many protestations of having passed a most delightful evening, the guests departed. Robin was hustled upstairs to bed by mother; while Ernie, Haze, and I proceeded to collect the various Christmas gifts that had arrived, preparatory to filling his stocking.

Really, there was so much! A delightful swan's-down comfortable for his cot from Aunt Adelaide; a set of building-blocks from Georgie; the *Jungle Books* from Mrs. Burroughs; and a regiment of tin-soldiers, with artillery and mounted officers, that had come in the morning's mail from Miss Brown. Next we brought out the home things;—a gay little dressing-gown that mother had made from her old cashmere shawl with cherry-colour collar and cuffs; a pair of crocheted slippers to match, this was my gift; a little white flannel rabbit, with pink beads for eyes and a fluff of a tail, from Ernie, and a really

amazing menagerie, of some hundred and fifty animals, elephants, giraffes, lions, tigers, leopards, monkeys, and all. She had traced the pictures from old magazines, transferred the outline to heavy paper, cut the figures out and coloured them.

"They're wonderful, Ernie!" I cried.

"But where's my present?" asked Haze, looking worried.

"It's coming," says Ernie. And, running from the room, she returned a moment later with—what do you think? Nothing more nor less than a *clam!* a live clam, if you please, neatly housed in the little glass globe that Hazard used to keep gold-fish in some years ago.

"Holy smoke!" muttered Haze, not knowing whether to be most disappointed or amused. "Wh-what's it for?"

"A pet, to be sure!" answered Ernie, nonchalantly. "I bought it of Murray, the fishman, and, though he said he did not usually sell clams

by the piece, when he did they cost just one cent. So we'll call it Abraham Lincoln in memory of your lucky penny. Bobsie will love it! It can snap at a straw if you try to tickle it, and hang on like a bulldog. You'll see."

"But how did you ever come to think of it, Ernie?" I asked.

"Clam-fritters," answered Ernie, succinctly. "We had 'em the other morning for breakfast, and then, too, we've been studying bivalves in school this term, and they are really *very* interesting animals."

So, the stocking was filled, with an orange, an apple, the molasses-candy figures,—chicken, pig, boy,—some sugar-plums left over from the party, my slippers, and the white flannel rabbit, whose pink silesia ears poked alluringly out at the top. Mother and I stole on tiptoe into the nursery to play the part of Santa Claus, by light of a shaded candle. We dropped the down quilt softly over Robin's crib, and stood for a moment watching

our baby, who, quite worn out with the evening's excitement, slept feverishly, a bright flush upon his cheek, his little breast rising and falling in answer to his hurried breathing.

"I hope it has not been too much for him," said mother, in a low voice.

"I hope not," I answered.

But we might have spared ourselves anxiety. Robin slept quietly through the night, and till half-past seven Christmas morning, when he woke as fresh and blithe as a lark. And how delighted he was with all his things! He positively shouted with joy over the paper menagerie and tin soldiers; and insisted upon being put into his new dressing-gown on the spot, with many sarcastic side remarks about "boys what said there was no Santa Claus!"

But the present that pleased him most of all was—Abraham Lincoln!

"It is what I wanted more than *anything in the world!*" he remarked, with a fondly doting

glance at his new pet. "Only I didn't think of it in time to say so. Now when Rosebud runs away and leaves me, I need never be lonely again!"

Though the rest of us did not fare as royally as Robin, there was some trifle for each one;—Ernie had seen to that.

"I had just fifty cents to spend on the entire family," she explained. "Don't you think I managed well?"

There were also a number of pretty gifts from Mrs. Burroughs, the score of *Robin Hood* from Meta for me, and a really portentous jackknife with three blades and a corkscrew attachment from Geof for Ernie.

"How jolly!" she cried, hopping about on her little pink toes. "I need never borrow Hazard's again, and I can pull all Robin's cod-liver oil corks! Hurr-oo!"

After breakfast came church. Haze volunteered to stay with Bobsie, so that mother, Ernie,

and I might go. But just as we were leaving the house whom should we meet on the front stoop but Geoffrey, bearing his much-heralded present for Robin,—a really handsome nickel-plated cage in which crouched a pair of tiny white mice!

“The darlings!” chortled Ernie. “I can’t leave ’em! I can’t!”

So she deserted mother and me, and followed Geof to the nursery. And when we returned from service some two hours later, the three enthusiasts were still gloating.

“Look, Elizabeth!” exulted Ernie. “We’ve let ’em out of the cage, and they are quite tame!”

“I’m going to call them Open, O Buds, O Open, and Sweet Fern,” remarked Robin, in sentimental accents. “Nobody helped me think of those names. Aren’t they pretty?”

“See, Aunt Peggy,” says Geof. “There’s a wheel to the cage, so they can get plenty of exercise, and the man I bought ’em of told me we might expect a family about every three weeks.”

"Dear me!" murmured mother, in some dismay. "I wish he hadn't been quite so lavish in his promises. But I must go down to attend to dinner now. Be careful of Rosebud, Robin. She would like your mice only too well, I fear."

The afternoon passed quietly, Ernie and Haze carrying our usual Christmas package to the little Kerns, whose mother used to wash for us, once on a time. She is an invalid, now, and the family are even poorer than we, poor lambs!

"So whatever we may have to go without ourselves, we can't afford to economise on Luella, Joseph, and Angeline," remarked Ernie some two or three weeks ago. And immediately she and Robin set to work patching up their dilapidated toys and picture books, generously casting aside those that were "too shabby," clipping, stitching, and gluing, till "the Kern shelf" in the nursery cupboard presented a very attractive appearance, indeed.

Mother added oranges, a jar of beef extract, and half a pound of tea.

"I do hope they will like their things as well as we like ours," sighed Robin responsibly, stuffing his molasses candy pig and the last of the sugar plums into Haze's overcoat pocket. "Do you think they will, mother dear?"

"I don't see why they should not," mother answered, and then she took Robin in her lap in the big rocker, and read him the Christmas story from St. Matthew, explaining about the Wise Men and the gifts they brought. After which she lowered the nursery shades, and left him to take a nap, "because," she explained, "I want our boy to be fresh and rested for this evening."

"What?" I asked. "More surprises?"

"Just a little one," returned mother, modestly.

Yet it turned out to be the most charming of all. You would never guess! A tiny toy Christmas tree, not more than a foot and a half high, lighted with twelve little candles, and gay with

popcorn wreaths, gilded walnuts, and silver tinsel.

"I found it on the Bowery," explained mother, half guiltily,—“in a small German shop. It was very cheap, Elizabeth. So don't worry!”

How Robin's eyes shone as he was carried into the back parlour, where the little tree stood sparkling on a table drawn up beside the couch!

"There are presents on it, too," says mother.

And so there were! For from every branch and twig dangled a series of coloured pasteboard discs, lettered in white ink, and reading thus:—

"A pearl ring, with much love to Elizabeth from mother."

"A pair of skates, for dear Ernie from mother."

"Lockhart's *Life of Scott*,—three volumes, good type,—for Hazard from mother."

"A canary in a gold cage, for Robin from mother."

"An ermine muff and stole, for Elizabeth from mother," etc., etc.

All the dear, beautiful, dream gifts that mother would have given to her children, if only she had been able!

The candles on the little tree began to blink and twinkle like living stars, the way lights will when looked at through happy tears. Even Robin understood.

"I love my autoharp better than anything in the world," he declared, dangling the small paste-board disc by its red cord. "Even, even, better than Abraham Lincoln!" he cried. "Thank you *so much*, mother dear!"

"And that Lockhart's *Life!*" echoed Haze, as enthusiastically as if he expected to sit down to the first volume next minute. "*U-m-m!!*"

"I hope I have not only succeeded in making you dissatisfied, my poor lambs," said mother, a little anxiously.

"Dissatisfied!" cried Ernie, striking out in fine skating style for the piano. "Do you think it's a brood of ungrateful brutes you've hatched into

the wor-rld, mum? Let's have some carols now. I want to shout!"

And so we did! Hazard quite off the tune, as usual, Robin piping away in his gay little treble, Ernie and I trying our best to keep the others up to time.

It was all very jolly; and, as I said when I first sat down to write, we simply could not have passed a lovelier Christmas, no matter how much money we might have spent,—now do you think we could?

Thursday, January 1.

WE sat up last night to watch the New Year in,—Haze, Geof, Ernie, and I. The workshop was cold, and we missed the flying-machine.

"I do not believe," declared Ernie, dejectedly, "that Resolutions do a bit of good. I have made the same four regularly for the last two years. I've written them out in red ink on a slip of paper,

and kept them in my Bible ;—and nobody seems to find me any nicer !”

“Perhaps they were not the right kind,” hazarded Geof. “A good deal depends upon what one resolves, I suppose.”

“The idea !” flashed Ernie. “I guess you did not make any better ;—say my prayers, wash my teeth, love God, and the Boarders, so there !”

“Too general,” criticised Haze. “You ought to do those things whether you resolve them or not,—and it wouldn’t be especially annoying even if you didn’t. It is my opinion that no man is competent to make his own resolutions. He doesn’t know where he most needs reform. If one’s family made them for one, now, and one was pledged in advance——”

“All right,” agreed Geof. “Let’s try it. I resolve, old chap, that you hold up your head when you walk, and quit peering through your glasses like a Reuben at a County fair.”

"And take only one butter-ball at dinner," seconded Ernie.

"And brush your coat every morning. If one isn't handsome, one can at least be neat," I cried.

"I'll see myself hanged," retorted Hazard, angrily, "before I resolve one of those things! They are childish, as well as insulting. If this meeting is going to degenerate into a travesty, I withdraw." And he stalked haughtily from the room.

"Silly chap!" chuckled Geof. "What did he get mad at?"

"Haze must be very conceited, if he can't stand a little friendly criticism," agreed Ernie. "Shall we take Elizabeth next?"

"No," I amended hastily. "I have just thought of such a good one for you, Ernie dear. Don't wear stockings with Jacob's ladders running up the leg. It isn't ladylike, and you have plenty of time to darn them."

"And stop worrying about the shape of your

nose," added Geof. "You can't change it, you know."

"I don't worry," snapped Ernie, untruthfully. "You are a pig, Geoffrey Graham! And I resolve that you learn to dance, so there!"

"Shan't do it," said Geof, with whom dancing is still a sore subject. "And if you are going to call names, I think it is about time for me to go home."

"Good-night," consented Ernie, readily.

"Good-night," returned Geof. And he picked up his cap, and left.

"Dear me!" I remarked as the first horn sounded, and the bells began to chime their welcome to the New Year;—"what made everybody so cross to-night? I am the only person who did not get mad."

"You are the only person who did not have a resolution made for you," replied Ernie. "Here is one,—and you can just see how you like it! Stop being so everlastingly ready to preach, Eliza-

beth. I know you call it 'sympathy,' but it bores people."

"Oh, Ernie!" I gasped. "Do you really mean that?"

"Well, perhaps not entirely," admitted Ernie, with a swift return to normal loveliness. "But there is some truth in it, dear. One likes to be blue at times, and feel that it isn't noticed. Come along to bed. I'm sorry I let Geof go without saying 'Happy New Year,' and I'm sorry we forgot to eat the Italian chestnuts he brought. After all, the old way of making resolutions was best."

"Yes," I agreed, "and pleasanter, by far!"

Then we kissed one another, and laughed, and crept down the attic stairs hand in hand;—for it isn't often that Ernie and I come near a quarrel, and the New Year was in. I wonder what it will bring us? Oh, I do want to be good,—resolutions apart,—not "preachy," of course,—just stronger, and more contented and happy in our lot.

Monday, January 5.

ERNIE wore her new dress to school this morning. She has been working hard on it ever since Christmas time, and the result is really very creditable.

"The girls will never believe I made it myself, Elizabeth," she remarked, standing proudly before the mirror while I buttoned her up the back. "It actually *fits*, and look at these box-pleats! Could anything be more stylish! Don't you think I'm clever, honey? now, *don't* you?"

Indeed, Ernie's spirits rose to such bubbling point,—what with the openly expressed admiration of the girls, and her own inward conviction of merit,—that she found it impossible to keep them corked up during school hours, and so got into trouble, poor child!

Under the circumstances it is doubly hard. For ever since September, when a "Visiting Board," as Ernie persists in calling him, was so impressed with the intelligent answers he ob-

tained to his questions in the Sixth Grammar Grade of School No. 47 that he was moved to offer five dollars' worth of books to be awarded as a prize at the end of the term to the pupil whose general average in attendance, conduct, and scholarship should be highest, her record has been impeccable.

"I simply must come out ahead," she has declared, over and over again. "It is too good a chance to miss. Five dollars' worth of books, Elizabeth! Think of it! And if I should get 'em, I'll choose the kind that will be appropriate to every age and gender, and then I'll put 'em away, and give them as birthday presents to the family during the year. Isn't that a scheme?"

So, spurred on by this proud ambition, Ernie has done wonderfully:—even succeeding in subduing her mercurial temperament to such a degree that "there is not a betther gur-rul in all the school than me an' me hated rival, Lulu Jen-

nings," as she was moved to confess last Saturday night.

This aforesaid rival is a "creature," according to Ernie and her chum, Mary Hobart. She has shifty little eyes, a thin, blond pigtail, and "*no shape* to her legs, at all." Also, she smells of cheap perfume. Yet these imperfections might be forgiven her, if only she were what the girls call "straight."

"I've seen her myself," says downright Mary, "with an open Geography hid under a handkerchief in her lap during recitation. She tattles, too, and I believe she'd copy off her own grandmother, if only she got the chance."

Naturally such sins are not easily forgiven; and there is a decided opinion among the girls that at all hazards Lulu Jennings must be prevented from winning the prize. Feeling runs high on the subject. "She's smarter than all the rest of us put together in some ways," they admit. "You can never foresee what trick she is going to

play next. But you are clever, too, Ernie, in a way we like better. So keep up the good fight!"

"All right," promised Ernie, with a weary little sigh. "I don't mind the studying so much; but I must confess I'm tired of being a plaster saint!"

And, alas! to-day, which was composition day, the poor little plaster saint fell! It happened in this wise. The subject assigned the Sixth Grade was Benjamin Franklin. Ernie, who takes naturally to writing, finished her essay as usual before any of the other girls; and then, just for the fun of the thing, and as an outlet, I suppose, to the general ebullition of vivacity caused by her new frock, she started in to write a second theme, in verse this time, making it as nonsensical and ridiculous as ever she could.

As soon as finished, she passed the lines to Mary Hobart, her seatmate, who began to read and giggle at the same moment,—till finally she was so overcome by mirth that she was obliged

to put her head into her desk, and pretend to look for a slate pencil.

Lulu Jennings, who sits directly across the aisle from Mary, observed these demonstrations. "What's the matter?" she whispered.

And Mary thoughtlessly passed her Ernie's effusion;—proud, I suppose, to prove to the enemy how clever her chum really was.

Lulu cast one quick glance down the lines. Then, taking up a pencil, she scrawled the query along the margin,—“Why don't you ask to read it aloud?” And handed the paper back to Ernie.

“I will, if you like,” returned Ernie with a chuckle; supposing, of course, that the suggestion was only part of the fun.

“All right, I dare you to,” whispered Lulu.

Quick as a flash Ernie was out of her seat. She has never been known to take a dare, yet; and Lulu counted upon this weakness, we feel sure.

“May I read my composition, Miss Horton?”

asked Ernie. There was nothing unusual in the request, since any girl who considers her theme extra-good is accorded this privilege.

Miss Horton looked up from the exercises she was correcting.

"Certainly, if you think it will interest us, Ernestine," she said.

Mary Hobart pulled at Ernie's skirt, shook her head, and motioned imperiously to the first composition which still lay upon the desk.

But Lulu's little eyes flashed the mean message,—“I knew you would not dare!”

And, without a moment's hesitation, Ernie in a clear, serious voice began to read :

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

Benjamin Franklin was, when a boy,
His mother's delight, and his grandmother's joy;
He would chase after lightning wherever he spied it,
Because he declared that he wanted to ride it.
His hair was quite straight, but his nose he could curl,
And so people thought him “a dear little girl!”

There was a general shout from the class, while Miss Horton rapped sharply on the desk with her ruler:—

“Silence!” she commanded. “Proceed with your composition, Ernestine.”

And Ernie, with a rosy and rather abashed countenance, was about to begin the second stanza when the door opened and Miss O’Connell, the principal, entered the room. Miss O’Connell is a very imposing person, and endowed with a rather high temper. All the girls are afraid of her. She stood for a moment looking majestically about.

“What was the cause of the outburst of disorder I heard just now?” she finally asked Miss Horton.

“Ernestine Graham is reading her composition on Benjamin Franklin,” answered Miss Horton, really anxious to shield Ernie, it would seem. “There was something in it that struck the girls as funny.”

"So I should judge," answered Miss O'Connell. "It might be well for me to hear the rest of the composition myself. You may proceed, Ernestine."

Poor Ernie! her knees were literally clapping together with horror beneath the elegant box-pleats of her new plaid skirt. The thought of her cherished record assailed her. She turned a piteous, sickly smile upon Miss O'Connell, who met it with a glance of adamant. Evidently no quarter was to be expected from that direction. So, steadying her voice as well as she could, Ernie began to read again. This time you might have heard a pin drop:—

Benjamin's father, a terrible man,
Kept in the closet a worn rattan;
When Ben or his brothers did what was wrong,
Their father would chant them this horrible song:—
"Run, run, to my closet as quick as you can,
And bring me my rat-te-tee, tat-te-tee, tan!
And with it I'll rat-te-tee, tat-tee-tan you,
Until with your eyeses you crieses, boo-hoo!"

Ernie gasped for breath.

"Is that all?" asked the inexorable Miss O'Connell.

"No, ma'am," answered Ernie, plaintively; and spurred on by the recklessness of despair, she began the last stanza:—

So Ben and his brothers they grew very good,
They never stole nothing, not even their food!
But lived upon pickles, and peanuts, and paint,
And when asked, "Are you hungry?" replied, "No, we ain't;
But we'll take, if you'll give it, a wee bite of soap!"
And now they're all dead, and in heaven, I hope.

With a final, hysterical giggle, Ernie dropped back into her seat.

Miss O'Connell stood looking at her.

"What possessed you," she asked at last, "to write such a composition as that? Have you no respect for your teacher? have you no respect for your school? have you no respect for *me*? Miss Horton, you may mark Ernestine a failure in her conduct and her English, too. She will remain after school, and rewrite her composition along

more conservative lines. The class may now proceed with its studies." And Miss O'Connell swept from the room.

Well, Ernie had had her little joke. Poor child! it was all she could do to blink back the mortified tears as she felt Mary Hobart's sympathetic hand in hers, and divined instinctively that the thoughts of every girl in the room were busy with her shattered record.

"I am sorry, Ernestine," said Miss Horton not unkindly, as she took up her pencil and opened the portentous covers of the Conduct Book. "Do you really think it was worth while?"

Lulu Jennings snickered; but quickly recovered herself with a prim pursing of the lips. Apparently, she was the one person in the room to experience any touch of satisfaction in the public downfall of "the plaster saint." Which speaks pretty well for Ernie's popularity, it seems to me.

"The mean *sneak!*" declared Mary Hobart

indignantly, some half-hour later, to the little group of sympathisers who lingered in the school-yard till Ernie should be released. "It was all a plot! And to think that I should have helped to lead Ernie into it! Well, I'm more determined than ever that she shall win the prize. We mustn't let her feel too discouraged, girls! we mustn't! The poor, silly darling!"

And now, lest you mistake me for a wizard, I will confess that Mary came home with Ernie after school. The two girls talked the excitement over as they set the table for dinner, while I stood in the kitchen doorway and listened, potato-knife in hand, till I felt quite as if I had witnessed it all myself,—and so I have set it down here, though it is hard to snatch time on a Monday.

Tuesday, January 6.

OH, dear! I am tired to-night. I have been ironing all day,—and I'm only seventeen.



I STOOD IN THE KITCHEN DOORWAY AND LISTENED

Sunday, January 11.

YOU haven't any idea how poor we are. It is half funny and half terrible,—trying to keep house for a family of six people on seven dollars a week! Just at first it did not seem impossible. There was a false impetus, so to speak; coal in the cellar, coffee, oatmeal, flour, etc., in the kitchen cupboard. For a while we were even able to keep up a semblance of our usual table, and Miss Brown did not seem to suspect. But she must find out soon. Will she leave us when she knows? What shall we do, if she does? Each meal is a crisis. I grow quite white and shaky before sounding the bell.

Mother still refuses to draw anything from the bank, and we can't borrow of Uncle George, either; because he was so hateful after the Hancocks left, and said things about father that it will be hard to forgive. If we had Haze's salary, we might advertise the rooms more often;—

but, as things stand, it is impossible, on account of that dreadful dollar.

Why did he have to lose so much money,—dear Haze,—when he had made such sacrifices to earn something, just for us? Why did Mrs. Hudson have to go, and the Hancocks, too? Oh, I do try to be brave; but to-night I feel rebellious,—and worried! I don't dare go to bed, though Ernie has been asleep this last half-hour. I wish I were more like her,—hopeful and full of expedients.

“The one thing that will do this family any good,” she remarked the other morning, as she stood in the dining-room window waiting for the postman to come down the block,—“is a legacy. I have given up all hope of the Dump-Cart Contract. It simply can't be found. But why shouldn't a rich relation, of whom we've never heard, die and leave us his wealth? Such things have been known to happen.”

And now, absurdly, we are all expecting it!

Even mother starts at the sound of the familiar whistle, and some one of us rushes breathless to the door to glower through the letters that are handed in. Heaven knows why!—for we haven't any rich relation except Uncle George. I suppose it just shows how desperate we are.

Saturday is pay-day, and we younger ones have acquired the habit of gulping our breakfast on that particular morning, and leaving the table as expeditiously as possible; so as to give Miss Brown, who is very delicate where money matters are concerned, an early opportunity to settle.

“Will she do it? will she say she is going to leave?” we whisper anxiously to one another, as we hang over the basement banisters. And Haze can't make up his mind to go downtown till he knows.

Yesterday morning we had a dreadful fright. Miss Brown came down a little late. Her expression was troubled, almost severe. When she

put her pocket handkerchief into her lap, we made sure that her purse was not concealed, as usual, among the folds.

"May I be excused, mother dear?" piped Ernie,—though she had only just begun her oaten-meal. "I want to go up to the nursery and sit with Robin."

Haze and I followed as quickly as we could, and then the waiting began. It seemed as if mother and Miss Brown would never be done. We could hear their voices in low, earnest discussion.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Hazard. "The game is up."

But it wasn't. Miss Brown had had facial neuralgia during the night. She was asking mother for remedies. She could not make up her mind whether it would be wise to put off the shopping trip that she had planned. Her purse was with her as usual. Saved again!

And the funny thing is, once we get those seven

dollars, we feel quite rich for a few hours, mother and I.—

“What shall we have for to-morrow morning’s breakfast?” one asks the other magnificently. “I notice that grape-fruit are selling two for twenty-five cents.”

“Scallops would make a nice change,” comes the cheerful reply. “Grape-fruit, scallops, and corn-muffins!”

Not that we ever commit ourselves to any such extravagance; but the little flight is exhilarating, and the final compromise on oranges and fish-cakes not too abrupt. It is true,—we are fed from day to day like the sparrows. If we can only wait and have patience, I suppose things will come out right in the end. And I said that I wanted to be good this year. Well, I believe I could be on ten dollars more a week.

Friday, January 16.

THIS afternoon a lady called to look at rooms. She had a little girl with her, perhaps a couple of years older than Robin. She said that she had been recommended to us,—by Mrs. Hudson!

Ernie let them in, and galloped upstairs to tell mother. You can imagine our excitement.

“Hush!” whispered Ernie, as she and I crouched behind the half-closed nursery door, listening with all our ears. “She told me the location was what she wanted. Oh, Elizabeth! Elizabeth!”

At that moment the lady swept on her way downstairs.

“The terms seem reasonable enough,” we heard her observe, “and the room is sunny and pleasant. I should want a comfortable cot placed in it for Lilian,”—the little girl. “You have children of your own, Mrs. Graham?” Then, stopping in the lower hall,—

"Is that an invalid chair?" she asked, abruptly.

"Yes," returned mother. "It belongs to my little son;—he is not at all well this winter."

"And his trouble?" There was no hint of sympathy in the question.

"Hip complaint," replied mother. "Robin has not been strong since he was a baby."

"In that case, I am sorry, but it will be impossible to engage the room," came the unexpected reply. "Lilian is a very sensitive child,—and, naturally, my first consideration. I make it a rule to shield her from every depressing influence. Let me see,—there are three other places on our list. If we hurry, we can make time to visit them this afternoon. Good-day, Mrs. Graham." The door closed sharply on our prospective boarders.

And this on a Friday,—the bluest day in the week!

Mother's face was quite white and stern as she came upstairs.

"If you will get dinner, Elizabeth, I'll stay with Robin," she said. And she took Bobsie in her arms, and carried him tenderly to the big rocker in the window, while Ernie and I crept, mouse-like, from the room.

"One might have known she was a friend of Mrs. Hudson," remarked Ernie, vindictively, as we reached the foot of the basement stairs. "Depressing influence, indeed! I'd like to depress her precious Lilian for her!"

"Oh, Ernie," I sighed. "It would have meant fifteen dollars more each week!"

We were to have beefsteak for dinner. Mother had gone around earlier in the afternoon to a cheap little butcher shop (we can't afford our old tradesmen any longer), and bought two pounds,—spending our last forty cents. There were four potatoes in the oven, a few beans on the top of the stove,—but no bread.

"Mother shan't be disturbed," I cried. "I'll run around to the baker's, myself, and get a loaf.

I'll say that I left my purse at home (which will be perfectly true, and, under the circumstances, eminently sensible!) and that they can charge it. Keep an eye on the steak, Ernie, and the fire. I've just put on a couple of sticks of wood."

"All right," answered Ernie, from where she sat on the table, dejectedly swinging her legs and muttering over an open Geography. "I'll watch it."

Yet when I returned from my errand some few moments later it was to find the kitchen full of smoke. In the middle of the floor pranced Ernie, frantically blowing upon a smutty and spluttering gridiron, while the red flames leapt hungrily through the open top of the stove.

"What have you *done?*" I cried, snatching the gridiron from Ernie's blackened fingers. "That steak is burned to a cinder! It's Friday night. There isn't any more money. Do you realise what this means?"

"Oh dear! oh dear! I was bounding the Brit-

ish Isles!" wailed Ernie. "And the fire didn't come up,—till all of a sudden everything began to blaze! Of course, I realise, Elizabeth. Can't we scrape it, or something?"

"No," I answered, transferring the hopelessly charred bit of steak to the big blue platter. "It is burned quite through,—and to-morrow is Saturday. How can we expect Miss Brown to keep on paying seven dollars a week,—once she finds out that we are unable to feed her?"

"Then chop off my head and boil it for her old dinner," sobbed Ernie, entirely overcome by this last, unlooked-for disaster, for which she could not but hold herself responsible. "Nobody'd miss it,—about the house, I mean,—and they used to eat such things once,—in the British Isles!"

"What is the matter?" asked mother, entering the kitchen at this moment with Robin's tray, and looking from one tragic-faced daughter to the other. "Has anything new happened?"

"The steak is burned," I explained, briefly.

"There are only beans and four potatoes left for dinner."

"Chop off my head," reiterated poor little Ernie. "I deserve it. I was bounding the British Isles,—and forgot to watch. I wish, I *wish* that I'd never been born!"

And then it was that mother "rose," buoyantly, unexpectedly, as she can always be depended upon doing, if only the situation is desperate enough.

"Never mind, darlings," she cried, with an airy little laugh. "Why,—it's nothing but a beefsteak, after all. We'll buy another!"

"*Another!*" I gasped, as if mother were contemplating the purchase of a diamond tiara.

"*Another!*" wondered Ernie.

"Certainly," returned mother, quite as though it were the most natural thing in the world she was proposing. "And some pickles, because Miss Brown enjoys them,—and perhaps some chocolate creams!"

"But, mother," I remonstrated. "It's Friday

night! We have spent our last penny. You surely are not going to borrow of Uncle George, —after the things he's said!"

"No," denied mother, succinctly. "There can be no compromise on that score. On the contrary, we'll reap a little belated benefit from one of dear father's follies."

And she led the way to the library (Ernie and I following in a state of stunned but admiring bewilderment), and selected a large, handsomely bound volume from the lowest shelf of the old mahogany bookcase:—

"It is *Picturesque Europe*," mother explained. "And your father paid six dollars for it, because the agent was a young widow with pathetic blue eyes, who assured him it would be of invaluable assistance in broadening Hazard's mind. Haze was two years old at the time, and nobody has read it since;—but it is going to be of some use, at last, and help us to another dinner!"

So she and Ernie hustled into their things,

and hurried around the block to the little second-hand bookshop where father used to snoop in happy by-gone days;—and when they returned Ernie was quite beaming and rosy again; for they brought three pounds of steak with them, instead of two, as well as a jar of pickles, and a pound of chocolate creams,—which last was nothing more nor less than a blatant extravagance, and put us all into uproarious spirits for the rest of the evening. And though Mrs. Hudson's friend was certainly *horrid*, and it is hard to be so poor that the singeing of a beefsteak threatens dire calamity,—just think how splendid it is to have such a wonder of a mother!

Yes, Haze and I are agreed, there are compensations in every lot.

Wednesday, January 21.

WE have formed ourselves into a secret society,—Haze, Ernie, and I. It is called “The Magnanimous Do-Withouts,” and this is the way it happened:

There is never enough to go round at our table any more, though the lowest shelf of the old mahogany bookcase is beginning to show some quite distressing gaps, and naturally Miss Brown has to be helped first and most liberally to everything. What she does not get is just about enough for three,—and, unfortunately, there are five of us.

“It wouldn’t make so much difference,” complained Ernie the other evening, “if only things could be managed with a little more fairness and system. I look fat, I know; but that does not prevent my growing hungry, and I’m tired of pretending that I have no appetite, and being threatened with Robin’s tonic! Good gracious,—I’d like to know what would happen if mother *did* give it to me! I only refused macaroni this evening because I knew Haze wouldn’t; and if we both took it, there would be nothing left for you. Was it very good, Elizabeth?”

“Yes,” I admitted. “It was nice, dear.”

"And filling?" questioned Ernie. "Of course, I'm sure Haze doesn't intend to be mean. He has a cough, and a habit of looking sort of pathetic, which takes awfully well with mother; but, all the same, it wouldn't hurt him to notice, and deny himself something once a week,—now would it?"

"You must remember the wretched luncheons he has, Ernie," I said.

"But he eats them in St. Paul's churchyard," retorted Ernie. "A very pleasant spot. And reads the old epitaphs, and goes in to look at the windows afterward." Then she poured a little of Robin's milk into a saucer for Rosebud, and set it down on the hearth.

"No," she soliloquised. "It isn't fair, and I'm not going to stand it."

The following day it happened that we were to have lamb stew with barley for dinner. It set on the back of the stove and simmered gently all the afternoon, while every now and again an

appetising whiff would be wafted to the dull cold nursery, where Ernie, Mary Hobart, and Robin were gathered about the sewing table in the window playing "Old Maid" and "Tommy-Come-Tickle-Me." The tip of poor little Ernie's nose was quite red, her hands were numb and chilly as she dealt the cards. She did not feel in the least convivial. Indeed, she confessed to me later, that, judging from the symptoms going on inside her, she supposed she must be starving, and had only a few hours more to live.

Robin also was restless and inattentive; but Mary Hobart, having lunched comfortably at home, thoroughly enjoyed the game.

"Let's have another deal," she cried. "I've been Old Maid three times! It's a shameful slander, and I shan't go home till my luck changes. Cut, Ernie!"

"It's getting pretty dark," hinted Ernie, glancing through the window at the beaconing street-lights. "Won't your mother worry?"

"Oh, no," returned Mary, disappointingly. "She knows where I am, and expects me to be late."

So Robin and Ernie played politely and hungrily on (that stew did smell so good,—*um-m!*) till at last the gong sounded, and Mary was obliged to go. But even then Ernie must help her into coat and hat, before she could scamper down to join the family in the dining-room.

"Will you have a little stew, Hazard dear?" mother was asking, as Ernie slipped with watchful eyes into her belated place. I had already been served. There were probably three spoonfuls left in the platter. The case was desperate. Ernie, realising this, leaned tragically over, and gave one swift, violent kick beneath the table.

There resounded a smothered shriek from Miss Brown. The warning had miscarried!

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" cries Ernie. "It was Hazard I *meant* to kick!"

“What in thunder!” retorted Haze. Then, in a sudden burst of hurt enlightenment,—“Ernie, you are a pig! I wasn’t going to take any of your old stew.”

Mother quietly helped the two combatants, apologised to Miss Brown for Ernie’s “awkwardness,” and dined upon dry bread herself. It was later in the kitchen that we gave Haze a talking to,—Ernie and I. He was very repentant, said he really had not noticed the scarcity before (!), and thought Ernie’s idea of a “system” excellent. So the society was organised. We are to take turns saying we do not care for things:—meat, vegetables, or pudding, as the case may be. But,—would you believe it?—this noon at luncheon Miss Brown actually refused a fishcake, remarking that she believed she was suffering from “a slight plethora”!

Perhaps she has suspected all along?—perhaps we need not worry as we do each Saturday morning? Oh, if this is true, what a *trump* she has

been! For she talks politics and the latest novel in the most natural manner in the world, neither complains nor criticises, and seems quite oblivious to our many and obvious shortcomings,—the prim, generous, tactful darling!

Saturday, January 24.

WE have had to give Rosebud away, and Ernie and Robin are quite heartbroken. It was because he drank so much of Robin's milk.

"It seems pretty hard to have to regard a kitten as an extravagance!" muttered Ernie, rebelliously, as she sat in the coal-scuttle this morning, clasping Rosebud to an indignant brown gingham bosom. "Who's going to tell Bobs, I'd like to know? It's all very well for mother to say we can't afford it. There are some things that people *ought* to afford."

"He'll be very happy with Mary Hobart, dear," I coaxed. "And you know he is growing up,

and has an enormous appetite; and he won't even try to catch mice,—except Robin's white ones,—and milk is eight cents a quart! Don't make it any harder for mother. She feels it as much as any of us."

"Of course, Mary will be delighted," continued Ernie, bitterly; "and I'll have to lie, and say it is because we want to make her a handsome present. Chums are pretty disappointing, sometimes,—and I can't understand Geof, Elizabeth! A boy who has three dollars a week pocket-money could certainly afford to offer to buy a little cat-meat once in a while. Not that we'd let Geoffrey do it, of course; but it would be nice to feel that he wanted to. He used to be so sweet and sympathetic when I was in trouble; and he hardly seems to notice, any more. Why,—he's not been in to see me for over a week!"

"Perhaps he is busy at school," I answered. "I'd be glad to think Geof was really studying in earnest."

"Oh, it isn't that," returned Ernie. "He has extra tutoring, I know; but he shirks it whenever he gets the chance, and slips off to keep some appointment with that horrid Jim Hollister and Sam Jacobs. They are not the kind of fellows he ought to go with." Then, with a swift return to the more immediate and poignant woe,—
"Dear Rosebud! dear pussy! It's too ridiculous,—being so poor one can't afford to keep a kitten!"

That was the part we found next to impossible to explain to Robin.

"I don't know what you mean," he sobbed, after the first outburst of violent grief was over. "I like Rosebud to drink my milk, Elizabeth. It's good for him."

"But it's good for you, too, Bobsie dear," I said. "And you are sick, and Rosebud isn't. Mother can't afford to buy more than one quart a day,—you know that."

"What's 'afford'?" questioned Robin.

"It means that we haven't the money. We are poor, dear."

Robin looked at me out of wondering tear-wet eyes. "Poor?" he echoed;—"like the people in stories? Oh, Ellie!"

Then he sighed, and soothed my hand, and was very sweet and patient all the rest of the afternoon. He even bade good-bye to Rosebud with fond stoical precision, patting the kitten on the head, and remarking: "It is best that we should part!" Dear, loving, little fellow! I really believe the information came to him as quite a shock. But fancy his having to be told!

When Haze came up from tending the furnace to-night his face was even more care-lined and anxious than usual.

"How much is there left?" I asked,—the inevitable question.

"If we're careful it may last till the middle of next week," returned Hazard, grimly. "Then, I

suppose, we'll begin pawning the spoons. Odd world,—hey?"

Certainly, it is hard for Hazey. One can't blame him for occasional bitterness. He is working faithfully and well in uncongenial surroundings, and has not had a cent of pay for weeks; while Geof, who is showered with the very advantages for which Haze so ardently longs, seems sullenly determined to make no use of them. Oh, the contrast is cruel! But mother says the struggle is bringing out a new manliness and self-reliance in Haze that are a daily surprise and joy to her. Roses again,—dear mother!

But something had *better* hurry up and happen soon!

Wednesday, January 28.

HE thought he saw a Banker's Clerk
Descending from the 'bus;
He looked again, and found it was
A Hippopotamus.

"If this should stay to dine," he said.

"There won't be much for us!"

We did not think it was a Banker's Clerk, but a Boarder! Robin, sitting in the wicker rocker in the window, spied him first.

"Hurrah!" he piped in his shrill little treble. "I just know that big fat man is coming here! He is going to ring our door-bell, and engage all the empty rooms! See, if he doesn't."—

And the prophecy came true! It was almost like the relief of Lucknow.

"All on a sudden the garrison utter a jubilant shout!"

For, oh! I don't know how much longer we could have held out.

It was day before yesterday that it happened. I had wakened with a start in the early, chill, grey morning, trying dully to remember how many potatoes still remained in the bottom of the vegetable box, and whether there was coffee enough to tide us through the week. It was certain that the coal would not last. Should we begin pawn-

ing the spoons then,—as Haze predicted,—or, maybe, mother's watch?

And, suddenly, it seemed as if life were not worth living any longer. I did not feel as if I could get up and make my way, candle in hand, down the narrow kitchen stairs to an arctic basement, and a sordid round of housework. It was Monday, too! The very thought made my back ache and my head swim;—but mother must not suspect, because I had persuaded her that the washing was not too much for me; in fact, that I rather enjoyed it!

And, to be sure, at the very beginning it had not seemed so bad. Novelty lent spice. With the optimism of ignorance I determined that mind as well as muscles should be exercised. While scrubbing I would learn French poetry.

So, with sleeves rolled above the elbow, the soap-suds splashing in my hot face, I rubbed, rinsed, and wringered, murmuring the while:—

O Richard! ô mon roi!
L'univers t'abandonne;
Sur la terre il n'est donc que moi
Qui s'intéresse à ta personne!

or in more romantic vein,—

L'aube nait et ta porte est close!
Ma belle, pourquoi sommeiller?
A l'heure où s'éveille la rose
Ne vas-tu pas te réveiller?

But this particular morning there was no enthusiasm left. My brain was dull, my tongue stumbled and tripped over the most familiar lines, I could not control my thoughts. Haze had a cough, and nothing but a sweet potato sandwich for luncheon,—the struggle was too unfair, too hopeless!—till, actually, I caught myself weeping into the wash-tub, bedewing the family linen with splashing tears.

Certainly, things did look black. It was over a month since the Hancocks had left us, nearly two since we bade farewell to Mrs. Hudson. Even mother was beginning to show the strain.

She looked worn and worried. As for me, I was *tired* of the dish-washing, the sweeping, the dusting; everything to be done afresh each day. I had not touched my mandolin for weeks. My hands, then puffed and scarlet, would be stiff and cracked on the morrow. I held them up and looked at them.

Which brought the thought of Meta, and the old inevitable contrast. That very evening she was going to a party;—a pretty, informal affair, consisting of charades, a supper, and a dance. How care-free her life was! How happily exempt from sordid considerations! She was surrounded by attention, gayety, admiration,—*I* would love such things, too!

A great fat tear rolled off the tip of my nose, and splashed down on Robin's little striped pajamas.

"Come, come," I told myself. "This is ridiculous! Cheer up, child, and repeat *Horatius*, if you can't remember any French."

But even Macaulay's stirring lines, with which Haze and I have heartened each other since nursery days, seemed to have lost their magic.

"Lars Porsena of Clusium,——"

I began; and ended on a sob. Till, quite unexpectedly, without the least premeditation, I found myself murmuring instead:—

"O Lord, raise up, we pray Thee, Thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, Thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; . . ."

It was the beautiful collect for the Fourth Sunday in Advent. There seemed nothing incongruous in repeating it above a washtub, either! Instantly I dried my tears. "Whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us!" *That* was the whole trouble! Parties, indeed! attention! What did they matter to

a girl blessed with the dearest family in the world to love and work for? My back stopped aching. I thought of little patient Robin upstairs in the big rocker, "pertending" to play with his "friends,"—how his pale cheeks would flush with pleasure if I could manage to hang out the clothes in time to sit with him a few moments before lunch. It was worth trying for! And so I did;—and it was that very morning, if you please, that Bobsie, looking down the street, uttered his jubilant shout:—

"A Boarder! A Boarder!"

His name is Mr. Lysle. He has a square, bland face, a portly presence, and a heavy artillery voice. It was Ernie who dubbed him "the Hippopotamus." He has rented our three empty rooms at the biggest price we have yet received for them; and he and his wife and his sister will move in on Saturday! Oh, how beautiful!—that we should have been so "speedily helped and delivered."

"My brave little Elizabeth," said mother to me late this evening, "you have been such a comfort, such a support! But it is over now, dear. We will send to-morrow for Rose to come back. We will order furnace coal, and—we *haven't drawn on our bank account!*"

Then she kissed me, and I blushed for very shame. For I have not been brave,—you know that, old diary,—at least not *inside*. How I wish that I might look back, and honestly feel that I have earned mother's precious praise!

Friday, February 6.

SCHOOL politics have been exciting these last few weeks, though in the stress and strain of home affairs I have had no time to report them. But Ernie has taken them very seriously, and for her sake we are glad the end has come. Yesterday the Sixth Grammar Grade was promoted, and the prize-winner's name read aloud from the platform. Can you guess who it was?

Let me take the matter up where I dropped it. Though naturally much discouraged and depressed by her sudden fall from grace that fatal composition day, Ernie bravely determined to retrieve her shattered fortunes. In this resolve she was supported by Mary Hobart, Hatty Walker, and a host of other friends.

"It was nothing but a ghastly accident," they urged, "helped along by Lulu Jennings; and, though, of course, a couple of failures will pull down your per cent., they need not entirely ruin it. You are cleverer than Lulu. Look at arithmetic alone, and the Visiting Board's problems! She hasn't solved one of them."

"We can't hold *her* entirely responsible for that," returned Ernie, quaintly. "I am quite sure he never intended they should be solved."

"But you have worked out answers to them," retorted Mary.

"Yes," Ernie admitted: "a different answer every day."

The problems in question were certainly difficult. There were ten of them,—ingeniously composed by “the Visiting Board”; and it was rumoured among the girls that even Miss Horton, herself, could not obtain a correct solution. They were intended for practice-work during the term, on the express understanding that one of the set, no one could predict which, should be included in the final examinations.

Naturally, they were the subject of much and anxious discussion. Lulu Jennings, in particular, suffered agonies of apprehensive doubt. Arithmetic is not her strong point.

“I don’t think it’s fair,” she declared. “He just meant to muddle us. The idea of making up such stuff out of his own head! There isn’t any key, or any way to prove ’em, and the answers are not even in the back of Miss Horton’s teacher’s book. I know, because——”

“Because?” questioned Mary Hobart. And

Lulu dropped her eyes, and coloured uncomfortably.

It was after her public disgrace that Ernie wrote out the entire set of problems in a blank-book purchased for the purpose, so that she might study them quietly at home. And how the child did wrestle!—shutting herself in the workshop Saturday after Saturday, till finally she discovered the correct solution! There could be no doubt. Worked out along certain intricate lines the problems could be proved!

The next morning, which happened to be the very day before examination, Ernie carried her precious book down to school.

"*Coo-ee!*" she yodeled to Mary Hobart, who formed one of a group of chattering girls on the second landing. "I have the answers!"

"Not to the Visiting Board's problems?" returned Mary, excitedly.

"Yes," Ernie replied, unable to repress her glee. "They are here!" tapping the book as she

spoke. "And they are right, too. They prove! —all those I've had time for!"

At that moment Lulu Jennings brushed past the excited pair. Apparently she was deep in conversation with a friend, and noticed nothing.

"If only she guessed!" chuckled Ernestine.

"Well, for goodness' sake don't tell her!" warned Mary, the cautious. "I wouldn't trust that girl with her own grandmother's plated spoons."

"Do you take me for a goose?" asked Ernie. "Let's put our books up, and perhaps we'll have time to eat an apple before the bell rings. I have a beauty in my blouse!"

So the two girls ran up to the classroom, where they found that Lulu had preceded them, slipped their books into their respective desks, and, returning to the schoolyard, divided the apple.

"I wish I could explain the problems to you, Mary dear," Ernie said. "But, of course, it

wouldn't be fair. It was quite by chance I hit on the right way. You can imagine my joy! I have only had time to prove the first six, but the others must be right. I'll work on them at noon."

However, long before noon, Ernie slipped her hand into her desk to take out the beloved book, and reassure herself by a hasty glance through its pages. She owns several blank-books; one for spelling, a second for "home-work," and a third for English. These were successively dragged out, and hastily thrust back again. With a queer little shock it became certain that the book containing the solution to the all-important problems was missing!

Ernie was puzzled, startled, but, just at first, she felt no suspicion.

Perhaps she had not put the book into her desk, after all. Perhaps she had dropped it on the landing in the hall. It was impossible to communicate her loss to Mary Hobart, who had

been sent to the blackboard to demonstrate a proposition. So Ernie raised her hand and asked Miss Horton's permission to leave the room to look for something. The request was granted.

Yet a hurried search of the stairways revealed nothing; and the more Ernie reflected, the more anxious she became. She returned to the classroom thoroughly puzzled and distressed.—When what was her amazement to discover the missing book lying in plain view on her desk!

Ernie took it up incredulously,—and was instantly conscious of a faint scent of musk.

She turned to Mary Hobart, who was just about to resume her seat, having finished her work at the board, and fairly hissed:—

"Smell of Lulu, Mary. Smell her! quick! ! !"

Mary looked at Ernie in bewilderment. "I don't *want* to," she whispered back. "Why should I, I'd like to know?"

"Go on," commanded Ernie, too excited to explain. "Smell her! You must!"

So Mary, with a puzzled and somewhat resentful air, inclined her head stiffly toward Lulu Jennings and began to sniff.

“Well?” questioned Ernie, with dilating eyes.

“Well,” returned Mary, crossly; “she smells of cheap perfume, as usual. It’s musk to-day. I hope you’re satisfied.”

“Yes,” returned Ernie, quietly. “And so, I haven’t a doubt, is Lulu. She has copied my problems! I’ll tell you after school.”

Certainly the evidence seemed conclusive enough, and Mary added still other links to the chain.

“Don’t you remember?” she said. “Lulu was at her desk when we put our things away this morning. While we were eating that apple, she must have taken the book; and no sooner did you leave the room to look for it, than she asked permission to put some stuff in the wastepaper-basket. I noticed, from the blackboard, that she paused at

your desk on her way back. She must certainly have returned it then."

Yet what was to be done? The affair was entirely too complicated to take to Miss Horton, even if Ernie could have made up her mind to that course.

"No," she returned to Mary's suggestion. "I just won't. I'm no tell-tale. I'd rather give up all thought of the prize, even if I have worked so hard for it. If Lulu Jennings can enjoy the books earned this way, she's welcome to 'em!" And Ernie thrust the fatal blank-book into the very bottom of her school-satchel, and snapped to the catch with a click!

The next morning examinations began, with arithmetic first as usual. Every girl in the class surveyed her paper anxiously, in search of the famous problem. It was there,—the ninth,—one of the four which Ernie had neglected to prove. At first this was rather a disappointment; but, having given up all hope of winning the prize,

Ernie quickly dismissed the matter and set quietly to work, merely determining to pass as creditably as she could.

The moments flew quickly by. Absorbed in her calculations, Ernie forgot all feeling of pique or disappointment; nor did she again think of Lulu Jennings till, having finished her paper, she passed it under final review, when something struck her eye!

She gave a little bounce in her seat, and caught her breath sharply. The answer obtained to the all-important problem was different to-day from that which she had written out before!

She remembered distinctly what that other answer was, and went hastily over the work before her to see where the mistake lay. But it was right. It proved! Figure by figure Ernie followed the intricate proposition, to which, without a doubt, she had at last obtained the correct solution! What had been wrong before she did not know, nor did she much care.

Instinctively her glance sought Lulu Jennings, who sat with head bent low above her desk. At the same moment Lulu raised her eyes. She did not look at Ernie, but cautiously toward Miss Horton, who was standing at the blackboard with her back toward the class. Lulu, seeing this, darted a stealthy hand into her desk, and brought out a little roll of paper which she placed in her lap, at the same moment throwing her handkerchief over it.

Ernie did not wait for anything further, but, rising from her seat, carried her paper to Miss Horton's desk. No one paid any attention, as it is customary for the girls to put up their papers when finished. On her way back Ernie stopped beside Lulu just long enough to whisper,—

“I wouldn't bother to copy that. It's wrong.”

Lulu turned first white, then red. She clutched the paper in her lap. Whether she heeded Ernie's warning makes little difference. The

mark she received was not especially creditable; and Ernie, who passed a nearly perfect examination, came out head, and was awarded the prize, after all.

“Just think, Elizabeth!” she chortled. “Five dollars’ worth of books! We’ll fill up the bottom shelf of the mahogany bookcase, again. I have my list all made out:—*Water Babies*, for Robin; *The Conquest of Granada*, for Hazard; Longfellow’s poems for you, dear,—and *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, for mother. The Visiting Board read the titles aloud from the platform, and said it was ‘a remarkably comprehensive selection.’ ”

“But, Ernie,” I expostulated, “what have you for yourself?”

“Pshaw!” says Ernie—“I told you I was going to use them for birthday presents. My birthday is past; and besides I wanted nice editions, and I really think I’ve made the money go as far as anybody could!”

"It is very sweet of you, honey," I said; "but we will share that Longfellow. Aren't Mary and the other girls delighted?"

"Indeed they are," admitted Ernie, with an ingenuous little skip. "I'm quite the Heroine of their young hearts! It's lots of fun, Elizabeth. Only, I'm sorry for Lulu. It must be horrid for her to look back and think how mean she has been,—and all for nothing, too!"

Wednesday, February 11.

OUR precious Robin has been far from well, lately. For some time now he has almost given up trying to walk. His crutches seemed to tire him more and more, and his left side has become so helpless that when he did attempt to get about it reminded one of a little lame bird trailing a broken wing.

The greater part of the day he has passed propped up with pillows in the big rocker in the window, or lying in his little crib, because he was

“too tired” to sit up. And the deepening shadows beneath his eyes have quite wrung our hearts.

Dr. Porter has been very kind and attentive, but far from satisfied; and last week the stern edict went forth. Robin was to go to bed and stay there for no less a period than six weeks, with a heavy weight attached to his little thin leg.

Well, there is one comfort. Our darling baby seems more like himself since he has been forced at last to give up. He has lost some of the languor and gentle indifference that seemed to be growing on him. His merry grin flashes forth with reassuring frequency, followed by the deep dimple high in his cheek.

“He is resting,” said the doctor, “and he needs it. That boy is grit clear through,—a quality of which I don’t approve in patients, Miss Elizabeth.”

“Would you rather have them whine?” I asked.

"Yes," returned the doctor, uncompromisingly. "I would."

But Robin will never do that. In the first place, everybody is too good to him;—Mrs. Burroughs, Miss Brown, and the three Lysles. Indeed, Mr. Lysle is kind as kind can be. He has brought fruit for Bobsie several times, and seems quite distressed because "the little invalid" has not a better appetite. To-day he declared that he really did not see "how the child managed to survive on such a small amount of sustenance." Whereat Ernie giggled, and I had some difficulty controlling my countenance, for it was at the table the observation was rumbled forth, just as the kind "Hippopotamus" was finishing his third helping of turkey.

Yes, turkey! if you please; though certainly it did seem some weeks ago as if the little Grahams could never again claim even so much as a bowing acquaintance with that royal bird. And after the turkey came ice cream and mince pie, served by

Rose in a spotless cap and apron, while Rosebud purred upon the warm hearth in the kitchen, waiting his turn to lick the plates! For no sooner did plenty begin to smile again upon our household than Ernie (naughty Indian-giver!), demanded back her pet. "Mary would just as soon have one of the grocer's new kittens," she affirmed. "I've asked him about it, and he says we may take our pick." So the compromise was effected. Rosebud, sleek and debonair as ever, returned to grace our home,—and such a welcome as the children gave him! Indeed, we were all glad. Things have not been so comfortable for months,—which reminds me of Robin's poem.

It was this morning, while I was washing his face, that Bobs repeated it to me. A little soap got into his eyes. He screwed them up, and then remarked,—

"You must be more careful, Elizabeth, when you wash me, else my poem won't stay true."

"Your poem, Bobsie?" I repeated. Though,

certainly, by this time I should be accustomed to the family weakness.

"Yes," answered Robin, shyly. "Ernie wrote one, you know, and Haze, too,—so I thought I would. Shall I say it?"

And, without waiting to be pressed, he graciously began:—

"Oh, what a lucky child am I,
As here upon my bed I lie
With all my needs and wants supplied,
My food, and everything beside;—
Clams, and white mice, and kittens, all!
And when I'm cold my mother's shawl."

"Isn't that pretty?"

"Indeed it is, honey," I answered. "How did you come to think of it?"

"Well," confessed Robin, "I'd been crying just a little yesterday, Ellie, because I wanted to pretend to play tag and I couldn't see out the window, and so I had to blow my nose; and I felt for my hankersniff under the pillow, and *there* it was! I didn't have to ring or anything! And that

made me think how lucky I am, and so I made up the poem. Is it nice enough to be written down?"

"It certainly is," I answered. "I will put it in my diary, and some day when you are a big fat man Ellie will read it aloud to you, and we will both laugh."

"Why will we laugh, Ellie dear?" asked Robin, innocently.

"Because we will be so glad that the little sick boy who composed it grew up strong and well," I answered.

And so I have written "the poem" here, that I may be able to fulfil my part of the prophecy.

But now I want to talk a little of Geoffrey, for we are really anxious about him. There is no doubt the boy is very much changed.

Yesterday afternoon he dropped in to see Ernie nearly an hour before school was out.

"Why, Geof," I said, "what are you doing here so early? It is scarcely two o'clock. Ernie isn't home yet. Did you have a half-holiday?"

Geoffrey looked confused. "Guess your clocks are wrong," he answered. "Can you give a fellow a bit of lunch, Elizabeth?"

"I thought you got your lunch at school," I returned. "But, of course,—if you are hungry. Rose has just finished baking. Isn't that luck?" And I ran down to the kitchen, where a glass of milk, a couple of bananas, and a plate of hot ginger-bread were quickly collected.

Geof ate in silence, crumbling his ginger-bread over the tray cloth on the library table.

"Geoffrey!" I remonstrated. "That's too good to waste. What you don't want I am going to take up to Robin."

"All right," answered Geof, pushing his plate indifferently toward me. "How is the kid?" Then he broke into a short chuckle. "I say, Elizabeth," he remarked, "there's a trained bear out at the zoo that would tickle Bobs most to death. I've been feeding it peanuts all the morning. It's gentle as a kitten, the

keeper says,—jolly good sort he seems, too,—and——”

“Geoffrey!” I accused, in sudden shocked enlightenment. “You have been playing hookey.”

Geof flushed angrily, and bit his lip. “Well, and if I have?” he blustered. “It’s nobody’s business but my own, I suppose!”

“It certainly is somebody’s business,” I answered, decidedly. “And you ought to be ashamed of yourself. After all the trouble you were in last term over hockey and athletics, I should think you would have learned that such foolishness doesn’t pay.”

Geof sprang to his feet. “Now see here, Elizabeth,” he said, “I’m not going to be jawed by you. I get enough of that sort of talk at home. If you can’t be pleasant, I’ll go somewhere else. There are plenty of other places where a chap can spend the afternoon, and Hollister and Sam Jacobs are glad enough to show ’em to me.”

“Very well, Geoffrey,” I answered. “If you

choose to treat the matter so! Only, I warn you frankly, in that case I shall go directly upstairs and tell mother,—I shan't feel that I have any choice,—and she will tell Uncle George, I know."

Geof turned on me incredulously. "You sneak!" he cried. "If that doesn't sound exactly like Meta!"

"Oh, Geof dear!" I expostulated, hurt and shocked by his violence. "Don't let's quarrel, or misunderstand each other. You know very well I don't want to get you into trouble. But Sam Jacobs and Jim Hollister are not the sort of fellows you ought to associate with. I don't believe you really enjoy the places they take you to, either,—and in the end it can't help but be found out. You are doing yourself an injustice, Geoffrey,—truly you are! Come, let's sit down and talk things over quietly."

I laid my hand on his arm. He tried to shake it off,—but the next instant his face changed.

"Hang it all, Elizabeth!" he blurted out. "If I had sisters like you and Ernie,—or a mother!"

And the first thing I knew big, strong, manly Geof had broken down, and was sobbing like a baby, his head buried in his arms on the library table.

And presently the whole wretched story came out. It seems that things have been going from bad to worse ever since last September. It was only by unusual pressure brought to bear by Aunt Adelaide, and equally unusual acquiescence on the part of the school authorities, that Geof managed to be promoted with his class this year, and he entered the new grade heavily conditioned in nearly all his studies. This, in itself, was bad; but what made the matter still harder was that in his case a weekly report has been substituted for the customary monthly one; he tutors three afternoons a week; and his progress is kept under rigid supervision.

"So if I'm not nagged about French, I am

about Latin," said poor Geoffrey; "and I tell you, Elizabeth, the schedule I'm carrying this year is enough to daze a Solomon."

"But do you really try to study, Geof?" I asked. "Have you made one honest effort to set things right?"

Geof flushed. "Yes; I have," he answered, sullenly. "But nobody believes it. And recently I've had so many headaches, and I don't sleep well nights, and——"

"If Aunt Adelaide knew that?" I suggested.

"She'd think I was faking," concluded Geof, hardily. "And I don't know that I blame her much," he admitted, the next minute. "You see, we never have gotten along. I was seven when my own mother died, and nine when the governor remarried,—just old enough to resent it. I remember for three weeks I wouldn't call her 'mamma,' till finally the matter was taken to headquarters, and I had to. And then Meta didn't make things any easier. We fought from

the very start. And they've managed to set the governor against me, till now—Well, the latest threat is, if my March reports don't show 'marked improvement' I'm to be packed off to the Catskills for the summer to a little tin soldier camp, where the fellows wear toy uniforms and tutor all through vacation. Pleasant prospect!"

"Then, Geoffrey, why in the world play hookey," I asked, "and throw away your last possible chance of avoiding it?"

Geof was silent.

"Come, be sensible," I urged. "Things do look black, I admit, but if for the next few weeks you learn the lessons set each day, and look neither forward nor back——"

"That's just it," interrupted Geof. "You've hit the nail on the head. There's too much behind me, Elizabeth. I can't learn what we are having now, because I didn't last term, or the year before. And,—and, you haven't any idea how hard it is when everybody is down on a chap.

Now that I'm out of athletics the fellows I used to go with have no further use for me; I never did get along with the grinds; and Hollister, Jacobs, and their set are always cordial and pleasant, at least. I've got to associate with somebody, I suppose? You don't know what you are talking about,—that's all."

"Yes, I do, Geoffrey," I replied. "It won't be easy to turn round, I know;—but what is the use of complicating matters still further? Right is right, and wrong wrong; and hookey never paid yet. Will you give me your word that you will go to school to-morrow?"

Again Geof was silent, and I waited. It seemed hard, unsympathetic,—yet what was I to do? "Will you give me your word, Geof?" I reiterated.

"All right," he muttered, sullenly, at last. "You have the whip-hand. I'll go to school to-morrow and the day after. I won't promise more than that. And Saturday, if I haven't seen

the governor myself, you are welcome to go and tell him anything you please. Does that satisfy you?"

It did not, entirely; but in Geof's stubborn mood it was the best I could hope for, and at least he will have time to think things over till the end of the week. Poor, foolish fellow! I hope I shan't be obliged to tell!

Saturday, February 14.

GEOFFREY has run away! So that was what he meant by promising to go to school till Saturday! Oh, I feel as if I were partly responsible;—and yet, how could I have suspected?

He was over here late yesterday afternoon. I did not have a chance to see him, as mother was out, and Robin rather feverish and fretful; but Ernie and he talked together in the workshop for nearly a couple of hours, and after he went Ernie came down to dinner with such red eyes.

"What is it, dear?" I asked, at last, when she and I were undressing together in our little room. "Was Geof in one of his moods again?" For Ernie had been on the verge of tears all the evening.

She dropped upon the bed then, with a little wail, and buried her face in the pillows. "I should say he was," she sobbed. "I couldn't do a thing with him. That hateful military camp! It's enough to drive anybody to desperation!"

"Is it settled?" I asked. "Must Geof really go?"

"Oh, don't bother, Elizabeth," returned Ernie, almost crossly. "He's going to talk to Uncle George to-night. He gets his allowance Fridays, you know; and to-morrow we'll hear."

Then she turned her face to the wall and pretended to go to sleep; but she was restless for hours, and once she cried out wildly in her dreams:

“Geoffrey! you mustn’t! You mustn’t, I tell you!”

No wonder she was anxious, poor child; for it seems that Geoffrey, after having first obtained a promise of secrecy, confided his plans to her yesterday afternoon. She is the only person who knows where he is now, and entreaties and arguments are equally of no avail. We simply cannot get her to tell.

The first alarm reached us this morning, just as we had risen from the breakfast table. There was a sharp ring at the door-bell; and Rose, answering the summons, found Maria, one of Aunt Adelaide’s maids, outside.

“Is Master Geoffrey here?” asked Maria, rather breathlessly. And, upon receiving Rose’s denial, she cried out:

“Then Lord-a-mercy knows what’s become of him! For he ain’t been home all the morning, not even to his breakfast, and missis and the boss, too, are in a great taking!”

Mother and I, who were on our way upstairs, overheard the exclamation and turned back.

“What is it, Maria?” asked mother, after having sent Rose down to the kitchen again. “Master Geoffrey has not been here since yesterday. You say he was not home to breakfast?”

“No, ma’am,” answered Maria; and proceeded to pour forth her tale. It seems that Geoffrey has been in the habit of over-sleeping recently, which indulgence greatly irritated Aunt Adelaide.

“Mrs. Graham thinks it’s only manners for the family to sit down to meals together,” Maria explained. “So this morning when Master Geoffrey did not come, she sent Jennie up to knock at his door, and Jennie, she knocked, and knocked again, and got no answer. So after a bit she came down, and said she could not make Master Geoffrey hear, and Mr. Graham jumped up.

“‘I’ll wake him myself,’ he says. ‘We’ve had enough of this sort of nonsense.’ And he went

and called very angry-like at the foot of the stairs; but still there was no reply;—and I was rather sorry for Master Geoffrey when his pa snatched off one of his slippers and ran upstairs and threw open the bedroom door.

“‘He’s going to catch it, sure enough, like any babby,’ I thought; but he didn’t, because the room was empty. The bed had not even been slept in.

“‘Hello!’ says Mr. Graham, in a disturbed sort of way. And he put on his slipper and came downstairs again; and directly breakfast was over they sent me here.”

“Can Ernie know anything of this?” asked mother, turning to me. “She is Geoffrey’s usual confidante. Run upstairs and get her, Elizabeth. I believe she has taken Robin his tray.”

All the colour died out of Ernie’s face when she saw me enter the nursery; but it flooded back again in a crimson wave as she listened to mother’s message. However, she settled Bobsie

to his breakfast, and quietly followed me downstairs.

“Have you any idea where Geoffrey is, Ernie?” asked mother, gravely.

Ernie’s long lashes swept her cheeks. “Isn’t he at home?” she returned, in a tone that was intended to sound innocent.

Mother smiled, just a little. “Don’t be foolish, dear,” she replied. “If you know anything about Geoffrey it is only right for you to tell us. We are not his enemies.”

For a moment Ernie stood silent; then she said, very low, “I know, but I can’t tell. I’ve promised.”

At that instant there sounded a second peal at the bell. This time it was Uncle George. Never before in my life have I seen him so upset, though it was evident he tried to appear indifferent.

His first words were addressed to Maria.

“Go home to your mistress, my good girl,” he said.

Then, turning to mother,—“It does not answer to send servants on such errands. They simply stand and gossip.”

Mother flushed a little. “Maria is quite blameless,” she replied. “I desired to hear all she knew in regard to Geoffrey. Have you any further news?”

Uncle George laid his hat carefully upon a chair, and felt in his coat pocket.

“It seems the young scamp left a note,” he said, in a voice that was husky, despite his assumption of unconcern. “It was not in his room, or we would have found it earlier. He gave it to Georgie last night, telling him to give it to me this morning as soon as he had finished breakfast in the nursery.” And Uncle George handed mother a folded sheet of paper.

“*Dear father,*” we read,—I was looking over her shoulder,—

“I find that I shall have to go away for I ment what I said wen you gave me my money tonight. It would be beastly

to go to that military-camp and I cant studdy and keep things up in the way that is expected it makes my headache. Perhaps there is something the matter with that part of my bran wich I have inherited from you. But dont worry this will not keep me from being a good bizness man wich has always been the fate I have most wished for. I am sorry to have made so much trubble and Ill come back some day. Dont let Georgie forget me and dont you forget me either

“Your loving son

“GEOFFREY MEADOWS GRAHAM.”

I wanted to cry as I read it. Poor, blundering, affectionate Geof, with his atrocious spelling and his “inherited bran.”

Mother handed the note to Uncle George again, without a word.

“Well?” he asked, shortly.

“It is very like Geoffrey,” she said; “though I never could have supposed he would run away. What are you going to do?”

“I, myself,” returned Uncle George, “would prefer to wait and give the young beggar a chance to grow tired of his experiment. That’s the medicine he needs. A chap who can throw over a

good home such as Geoffrey has, ought to be made to rough it a bit. But the women folk won't hear of it. Meta and her mother are in a great taking. They imagine all sorts of foolishness, and it's on account of them, more especially, that I have come over to interview your Ernie. Come, young woman! What have you got to say for yourself? Do you know anything of Geoffrey's whereabouts?"

Again Ernie flushed crimson, lowered her eyelids, and remained silent.

"I have already questioned Ernestine," said mother. "She undoubtedly knows certain facts which would be very useful. I hope that I shall be able to convince her it is her duty to tell us."

Uncle George looked from mother to Ernie in blank amazement. "Do you mean to say she won't tell?" he demanded. "Then there is only one way out of it. She must be made to."

"I shall try to show Ernie that it is the only

way in which she can be of any help to Geoffrey," answered mother, quietly.

Uncle George frowned impatiently.

"I'll tell you what," he said, after a moment's thought. "I'll give her a five-dollar gold piece for the first bit of information she has to give us. What's more, I'll make it twenty-five dollars, if it leads to Geoffrey's capture before night. What do you say to that, my girl?"

It would be impossible to describe the look of horror depicted in Ernie's features. Betray Geof, her dear chum, her more than brother, for a sordid money reward! If Uncle George had only known it, our last chance of winning Ernie was lost when he uttered those hateful words. But he did not know, and it would have been impossible to make him understand. On the contrary, he picked up his hat with a satisfied expression of having set things on the right track, at last, and after a final injunction "to keep him informed," left us.

Mother and I looked hopelessly at one another as the front door closed behind him.

“Ernie, dear,” said mother, very gently, “setting aside all thought of Uncle George’s offer, for, of course, it is out of the question that you should accept any money,—I expect you to tell me at once all you know in regard to Geoffrey’s plans. It may be the means of saving him great hardship, and discomfort.”

“Yes, Ernie,” I urged. “And everybody is agreed that it is much better to break a bad promise than to keep it. Doesn’t your own common-sense tell you that?”

But reason, command, entreat as we might, Ernie remained obdurate.

She sat on the top stair leading down to the basement, the big tears welling in her blue eyes and trickling along her nose till they dropped from the tip with a little splash into her lap; listening plaintively to all we said, replying nothing,—a moving picture of stubborn misery.

At last mother desisted.

“Ernie,” she said, “I want you distinctly to understand that I am both disappointed and displeased with you. You are the one person who can be of any help to Geoffrey; but I shall ask you no further questions. When your own good feeling and sense of right prompt you to follow my wishes, I shall be ready to listen to you.”

Then mother dressed and went to see Aunt Adelaide; I ran up to the nursery to Robin; and Ernie locked herself in the workshop, where she set to work painting a gorgeous family of Japanese paper dolls for Mary Hobart’s birthday,—spattering their beflowered kimonos ever and again with a salty drop. She was very forlorn, poor darling;—distressed beyond measure to feel that her family disapproved of her. Yet she had given her word to Geof.

So the morning passed. Lunch time came, and still there was no news. The afternoon dragged even more heavily; and when Hazard

came home from the office in the evening he told us that Uncle George had three detectives looking for Geof, but as yet they had found no clue.

Dinner was somewhat of an ordeal. I had the head of the table, as mother did not feel she could leave Aunt Adelaide, who is in a very apprehensive and nervous state. We tried to keep the conversation to general topics, but the anecdotal vein of the boarders was not to be stemmed. It seems that Geoffrey's escapade reminded everybody of some long-forgotten incident in his or her own family, or the family of a friend, or even a friend's friend.

Nothing was too far-fetched to be appropriate, every possible climax to the adventure was predicted, and the same heartening conversation continued when we gathered in the parlour after dinner to wait for news. Till, finally, about half-past ten or so, the boarders began to disperse to their rooms;—yet not before Mr. Lysle had made a brief, though painful, effort to win Ernie's con-

fidence; for she is a favourite with the kind "Hippopotamus," and it grieved him to know her in disgrace.

Therefore, interrupting his sister, who was condoling with Miss Brown over the sad fate of a nephew of the latter's mother's aunt, who eloped with a sea captain's daughter some sixty years ago, and was finally eaten up by whales off the Cape of Good Hope (I believe it was thus the thrilling story ran), Mr. Lysle, with a sly wink at his wife over the top of his newspaper, began:

"Miss Ernie! ahem!"

Ernie looked up from her "home-work," and the "Hippopotamus" continued ponderously:

"I suppose you are familiar with the famous anecdote of George Washington and his hatchet? How, when still a young boy, the Father of Our Country found it impossible, even with the fear of stern chastisement before him, to tell a—er—a—lie?"

Ernie cautiously refusing to commit herself to

any previous acquaintance with the incident, Mr. Lysle continued blandly :—

“Now, my dear child, a similar opportunity is presented to you,—an opportunity such as you may never meet again—a grand opportunity! a great one! The path of truth is a path of roses, for all that it has its thorns,—even, if I may say so, because of them!”

He paused impressively, and looked Ernie firmly in the eye. We, the audience, waited breathless, but still Mr. Lysle did not speak. So, supposing, at last, the homily must be concluded, we were about to return to our various avocations, when he positively thundered forth :

“*Where* is your Cousin Geoffrey? Where is that wilful lad? Speak! I command you!”

Everybody in the room jumped, and Miss Lysle, who is nervous, uttered an hysterical little squawk, like a frightened hen.

Ernie alone remained undaunted. The poor “Hippopotamus” continued to gaze at her, tri-

umph fading to chagrin, till, finally, he turned to his wife with such a disappointed air:—

“I thought I could surprise it out of her,” he said; “but, evidently, I—er—couldn’t!” And a few moments later he bade us a subdued “good-night” and was soon followed upstairs by the rest of the boarders.

It seems too strange to be sitting here writing these things, with no idea where Geoffrey may be! If only I did not feel my own responsibility so keenly! I can see now that I should have told mother last Tuesday when first I heard of Geof’s trou—. There is the bell! It may be news . . .

Yes! and good news, too. Geoffrey is found! He was brought home about eleven o’clock by one of Uncle George’s detectives, who ran across him in a little out-of-the-way cottage in Elizabeth, where he had spent the day with a German woman, who was once a cook at Uncle George’s when Geoffrey’s own mother was alive. She is

married now, and has a neat little home of her own, with three fat German babies.

There Geoffrey arrived late last night, and tomorrow morning he had planned to set out again on his travels and beat his way to South Dakota, where Mrs. Prendergast, the German woman, has a brother who works on a cattle ranch! Think of it!

Dear little Ernie broke down completely when she heard of Geoffrey's capture. She threw herself into mother's arms, sobbing convulsively:—

"I didn't mean to be naughty, mother dear! I didn't! And, of course, you know best—only I had given my word, you see, and then Uncle George might have *made* me take that hateful money! Oh, what are they going to do to Geoffrey!"

"There! there, dear!" said mother. "Don't cry so. It is all over now. And as to Geoffrey, you need not worry. Aunt Adelaide and Uncle George are only too anxious to forgive him. He

has acted very wrongly, and given us all a great fright; but it has been a lesson to everybody concerned, and I don't think Uncle George holds Geoffrey entirely responsible."

And later, after Ernie had snuggled down in bed, where she dropped at once into an exhausted sleep, mother confided to me that she, as well as Aunt Adelaide, fears that Geoffrey is going to be ill.

He seemed quite unlike himself this evening—indifferent and almost dazed, and he still complained of headache. Aunt Adelaide sent him at once to bed, and this morning, if he is not better, he is to see a doctor.

I say this morning, because it is already nearly two o'clock. My eyes are sticky with sleep. I cannot write another word, except to add that even if Geof is to be ill, we are all thankful!

Tuesday, February 17.

GEOFFREY has typhoid fever. So,—mother and Aunt Adelaide were right. Oh, why could we not have suspected before? The doctor says the disease has been coming on for months;—which accounts for Geof's headaches, his sleepless nights, his general indifference and lassitude. And we know, too, now, that he never would have tried to run away, never would have frightened us so, had he been himself.

How hard and unsympathetic we must have seemed these last weeks; for he was sick, poor dear, and dazed, and stupid. He could not explain, and we would not understand.

Well, we are going to be good to him, at last, and make up,—Meta, Aunt Adelaide, all of us. "Only," says Ernie, with an anxious little frown (it was she who brought the news this morning before school), "we will have to wait a while, I guess. Meta says Miss Barron, the trained

nurse, is a regular tyrant. She won't let any one near Geof."

It seems that Meta wanted to go to Geoffrey and apologise as soon as she heard that he had typhoid. The memory of their various scraps and misunderstandings troubled her. She made quite a point of the matter, till Miss Barron said it was out of the question. Then Meta determined she would slip in on the sly,—for she is very wilful, once she gets an idea into her head. So she watched her chance, stole up when no one was on guard, got as far as the door, and peeped in.

The room was quite dark. Geoffrey's head was swathed in towels and an ice-bag; he kept turning it from side to side upon the pillow. His eyes were staring open, and he was muttering to himself in an odd hoarse voice. Suddenly he caught sight of Meta, who was advancing on tip-toe into the room, started up on his elbow, and shouted "*Scat!!*"

She turned and ran, poor thing, right into Uncle George, who was coming upstairs with the doctor, and he scolded her, and sent her to her room.

I am afraid Geof is going to be very ill. Dr. Porter, who called to see Robin this afternoon, was extremely uncommunicative. "It is impossible to predict at this stage," was all we could get him to say. "Fortunately, the boy has a good constitution."

Wednesday, February 25.

GEOF no better. Oh, how can we endure this suspense!

Sunday, March 1.

GEOFFREY desperately ill. He is delirious the greater part of the time, or lies in a heavy stupour.

Poor little Ernie, who goes every day for news, crept up to his door yesterday morning, crouched

outside, and listened. Geof was singing in a queer, hoarse voice:—

“Forty years on, when afar and asunder,
Parted are those who are singing to-day,
When you look back and forgetfully wonder,
What you were like in your work and your play . . .”

followed by snatches of the Eton Boating Song. Then he would break off to shout football signals:—

“25, 39, 15—Left-end and Tackle over! 19, 56, 22—You fellows, there! What are you trying for? 19’s a bluff! Can’t you remember what’s told you,—confound it!”

Interspersed with muttered snatches of German, and Latin paradigms. “And, oh,” mourned Ernie, pathetically, “we’ve done dear Geof a great injustice, Elizabeth. It’s amazing all that boy knows! He repeated lines and lines of Cæsar;—I only wish Haze could have heard him!—and strings of irregular French verbs, and then

began to say the Capitals of the States, and exports and imports! It was simply wonderful! I felt so proud!"

But mother and I are frightened. Geof never would have known such things in his right mind, we feel sure; and we suspect that Dr. Porter fears cerebral complications. A consultation was held yesterday, and a second nurse has been engaged to relieve Miss Barron.

Monday, March 9.

THE fever has still three weeks to run. It does not seem as if Geof could hold out. Ernie has grown so pale and still these last few days. Mother and I are really anxious about her.

Wednesday, March 18.

I AM desperate. I can't bear it! I can't! We have just been told that our precious Robin must undergo an operation. Didn't we

have enough to endure without this? Geoffrey so ill,—not past the crisis yet,—and now Bobsie, my own baby, whom I love better than anything in all the world!

God is cruel! . . . Oh, I don't know what I am writing! I must calm myself.

This afternoon, after hearing about Robin and trying to write, and giving it up, I put on my hat and jacket and escaped alone to the Park. I walked fast, and just at first I did not notice anything,—the bare branches of the trees against the early sunset sky, the patches of melting snow about the rhododendron bushes, the children playing with their nurses on the common,—till one little fellow with rosy cheeks and shining eyes came running, laughing and shouting over his shoulder, and stumbled against me. “S’cuse me!” he piped, and shied off again.

It was like a knife in my heart! I wondered stupidly why it should hurt so, and sat down on a

bench to think;—and then I knew it was because Robin had never run like that. Oh, he has missed so much in his little life!

I remember perfectly Bobsie's first birthday. How I woke with a start, before it was yet light, and saw the morning star, big and beautiful, shining in at my window. I sat up in bed, and clasped my knees and blinked at it,—conscious of an unusual stir in the house. Till all at once there rose a little cry! How my heart beat. I jumped out of bed, slipped on my dressing gown and slippers, and crept down the stairs to mother's door, where I crouched against the wall and listened.

A few moments later the door opened, and Mrs. Parsons, the nurse, poked her head out. "Bless my soul," she said, "I almost thought you was a ghost, my dear. Run down to the library like a good girl, and tell your pa that everything is all right. It is a fine little boy and your mamma is doing nicely."

"Oh, nurse," I breathed, "might I see the baby first?"

"To be sure, you might," answered Mrs. Parsons. And she went back into the room and returned again with a little white flannel bundle which she laid in my arms.

And I put back a corner of the blanket and peeped in, and there was Robin smiling up at me! His eyes were big and dark, just as they are to-day, and he blinked them. Everybody says it is impossible that Robin should have smiled; but I saw him, and I know. So the next morning, I put away my dolls, and never played with them again. It would have been too stupid, with a real baby to mother, and dress, and sing to.

"She's crying!" chirped a little voice. For I was thinking of these things as I sat on the bench in the Park; and sure enough the tears were on my face, and I looked up to find three chubby tots standing hand in hand before me, staring in a solemn row.

So then I got up and came home again, since I did not care to make a public spectacle of myself;—and mother met me on the doorstep with outstretched hands, and her own brave smile.

“My darling,” she said, “I meant to spare you; but I am afraid it has come as too much of a shock. Come into the parlour. We will have a cup of cocoa.”

And when I was tucked snugly on the lounge and had wept my little weep where no one could see,—we talked it all out together. What comfortable institutions mothers are!

It seems that if Robin does not have the operation now he can never have it. A few months later would be too late. And though Dr. Porter had hoped to obviate the necessity by a long rest in bed, everything else has failed. There remains this one chance.

“So we must be brave for our baby, Elizabeth,” explained mother. “He is too young to make the decision for himself. The doctor spoke

to me of the matter first before Christmas. I would not tell you then, dear, since there seemed a chance of escape, and we had worries enough without adding anything else. But that was why I was so determined not to draw from our little stock of money. *You* helped me there. Think how thankful we should be that we do not have to borrow, that we can engage a nurse for Robin,—everything that is necessary. He need not even be moved to a hospital, Dr. Porter says. It will all be over in a couple of weeks, and whatever the result there will be the inexpressible comfort of knowing that everything possible has been tried. Are you satisfied? Do you blame me?"

"No, no, indeed!" I answered. "Only,—I think I hate the doctor!"

"Oh, Elizabeth!" smiled mother, as she took my empty cocoa-cup and put it upon the table. "And now I want you to run up to your room, bathe your face, and put on a pretty frock. Mrs. Burroughs has sent over a charming mould of

orange jelly and some lady-fingers for Robin. There is to be a tea-party in the nursery, and you and Abraham Lincoln are invited. What do you think of that?"

It was one of mother's dear, considerate schemes to save my tell-tale eyes from a downstairs dinner. So I kissed her, sped up to my room, dabbed a little powder on the tip of my nose, and donned my forget-me-not dress. Robin's invitation should be honoured with the best I had.

How his black eyes danced when I entered to him in all my finery:—

"Allow me the Honour of Presenting my Friend, Mr. Abraham Lincoln," he piped. "There's the globe, Elizabeth, on the side of the bed. You must pretend to shake hands, and p'raps we can get him to eat a little lady-finger."

So I pretended to shake hands with the much-enduring Abraham Lincoln, and tempted him

with lady-fingers and orange jelly, both of which delicacies he obstinately refused.

"Never mind," says Robin. "He doesn't know what's good. *We* will eat instead."

Such a jolly party as it was! We told stories, guessed riddles, and ran races to see who could dispose of the most sandwiches; till even the kind "Hippopotamus" could not have complained of Robin's appetite. But, at last, he grew tired, and the weary pain returned:

"Take away the party, please, and sing to me, Ellie dear," he said.

So I carried the tray outside, and came back and sat down by the bed, and with Robin's thin little hand in mine, sang to him,—all the dear, familiar "heaven hymns" that we have both come to love so well. And Bobsie cuddled up against my arm and closed his eyes and sighed.

And then somehow I knew that if he is not to grow up strong and straight like other boys, if he is to suffer more and more as the years go by, it

would be cruel to want to keep Robin. And, oh, I went on singing, and my voice did not once break or trail! So perhaps God will forgive the wicked words I wrote when I was so wild,—for I believe I can be brave now because after a bit Bobsie dropped asleep with his hand still in mine, and—I think, before I left him, that I said “good-bye.”

Sunday, March 22.

IT is over. All yesterday morning Ernie and I sat on the attic stairs, holding each other's hands and trying to feel hopeful.

“He had such a pretty colour in his cheeks last evening,” said Ernie, “and he did *so* enjoy looking out the window. Buster was there, and John waved his hand before they went away. It was a good sign that the doctor should have let him up in his chair for half an hour,—don't you think so, Elizabeth? Robin has a lot of vitality.”

"Yes; I know he has," I agreed. "And if the operation does go well,—how splendid it will be!"

"Somehow one never thinks of Bobsie running about like other boys," continued Ernie,—“going to school, and playing marbles, and doing errands. I,—I can't hardly realise it."

"Neither can I," I answered, and for a while there was silence between us.

Then Ernie began again:—"How good everybody has been! Uncle George even offered to pay for the operation. I'm glad we didn't have to accept, though;—and we ought to be very thankful, too, Elizabeth, about the boarders. The oatmeal was burned this morning,—did you notice?—and they never said 'boo'! Just think, if Mrs. Hudson had been here!"

"I know it," I answered. "Oh, Ernie, if Robin and Geof pull through, there is not another thing in the world we could dare to ask for!"

"I've prayed, and prayed," returned Ernie,

simply. "And I saw Miss Barron yesterday, and she says that Geof is holding his own."

Then for a long time we were quiet, each thinking her own thoughts. It seemed as the morning would never go.

"Robin isn't feeling anything at all," said Ernie, at last. "Dr. Porter promised that. It was to take about an hour, Elizabeth, only, of course, there would be a great deal to get ready first. I must see what time it is. It seems as if we had been sitting here weeks!"

And Ernie opened the hall door and stole out into the light, blinking like a little owl. A moment more and she was back,—very white and scared.

"It smells so of chloroform," she confessed. "I,—I didn't quite reach the clock."

So then we shut the door again, and waited a long, long while; till, at last, we heard mother call:—

"Elizabeth! Ernestine!"

I sat quite still, but Ernie ran down and threw back the door:—"We are here, mother dear, on the attic stairs."

"Oh, my poor lambs," said mother, with a little catch in her voice. "Couldn't you have found a more comfortable place to wait? But it is over, now. Dr. Porter declares the operation a complete success; and Robin has come out from the anæsthetic beautifully!"

"Oh!" gasped Ernie. And then, with a quick little cry,—*"Elizabeth! Elizabeth!"*

I couldn't see why she should be calling me, when I was right there sitting on the top step looking down at her. Till . . .

The next thing I knew they had me on the attic floor, a pungent scent of ammonia at my nose, while Ernie poured cold water down my neck in a vain attempt to get me to swallow, and mother relieved me of my collar-button.

"Go away!" I murmured, crossly. "I am only resting."

"Then do it with your eyes open," commanded Ernie. "We aren't used to fainters in this family!"

"I think she is all right, now," said mother. "We will get her into the workshop to Hazard's cot."

So there, despite all my protestations, they put me, and after a while the doctor came up and gave me some medicine in a glass. It was very mortifying, but he said I could not help it, and perhaps if I had not made up my mind to expect the worst, I should have borne the news better. And, next, if you please, I went to sleep,—it was that medicine, don't tell me!—and never woke till evening, when dear Haze brought up a tray and sat beside me while I ate some chicken broth.

"Bobsie is doing splendidly," he said. "Of course, we have none of us seen him yet, except mother. And, Elizabeth,—don't faint, there's a good girl,—but Geof has passed the crisis! They telephoned Uncle George at noon. The

office had a half-holiday. I came home, heard the good news about Robin, and then went shopping!"

"Shopping, Hazey?" I repeated; for it seemed rather an odd way for him to spend his afternoon.

"Yes," returned Hazard. "Want to see what I got?" And, with a somewhat conscious smile, he sidled toward the workshop door. A moment later and he was back, bearing a portentous-looking package:—which, the wrappings being quickly removed, revealed a beautiful Clement Braun print of the Sistine Madonna, finished in soft sepia tints and set off by a charmingly tasteful frame.

"Oh, Hazard!" I cried. "How lovely! Is it for Robin? No,—he is hardly old enough. You must have bought it for mother."

"Well, I didn't then," contradicted Haze. "It's just for you, my dear. You see I had planned to get something like this at Christmas,

but I lost my money, and couldn't; and you stood by me like a trump, while all the rest of the world thought I was pretty much of an ass,—and didn't hesitate to say so, occasionally. Sometimes I have been afraid you didn't know that I appreciate what a splendid chum you are, Elizabeth. So I determined to find some way to show you, and as soon as I began to draw my salary again I thought of this. It's an Easter present,—but I wanted you to have it to-day."

"You dear!" I cried. "Oh, Haze, I've always wanted this Madonna. But it must have cost a lot,—and you have given mother two dollars every single week! How did you ever manage?"

Hazey blushed beamfully. "That's all right," he answered with becoming modesty. "I'm glad you like it."

And, looking up, I noticed again what mother and I were commenting upon only the other day.

"Hazard," I accused, "you are thin! You

have been saving from your lunches,—don't deny it!"

"Oh, I'm used to short rations," admitted Hazard. "It wasn't anything at all, Elizabeth. But it needn't happen again, because (now *don't* faint, there's a dear) I've been promoted, and am to get five dollars a week from now on! It all comes from my head for figures. You see, I've been helping Mr. Simpkins lately,—he's senior accountant,—and he was pretty well satisfied with my work. So when Bridges spoke of taking me back into the outside office, what should the old man do but go direct to Uncle George with the matter, and say he couldn't get along without me. Uncle George was very much pleased, I really think; so I'm to have what is practically a junior clerk's position,—though my official title is only 'Simpkins' boy,'—and a two-dollar increase in salary. Rather a pretty turn of luck, hey?"

"Then you helped turn it, Haze darling," I answered. "And you've earned it every bit! You

have worked well and faithfully at things you hated, without any hope of reward. Oh, I'm proud of you,—we all are!"

And just at that moment mother and Ernie came up, and helped me congratulate him;—and after a bit, when we had discussed the news from every possible point of view, we all went down to hang the picture, and Ernie and Haze insisted upon supporting me tenderly, one on either hand, which was ridiculous! And before I went to bed they let me in to kiss Robin; . . . and now it is to-morrow morning. I am sitting at my desk writing, with, oh, such a thankful heart! while above me on the wall hangs Raphael's most beautiful Madonna, quite glorifying and illuminating this shabby little room.

Sunday, April 5.

SPRING has come at last with Easter. Such a beautiful blue sky as we woke to this morning, such tender breaths of gusty air!

"It seems funny to be putting on one's winter hat," remarked Ernie, cheerfully, as she picked up her shabby gray beaver and shook out its matted pompon; while I sniffed suspiciously at my white gloves in the window, wondering if they really did whiff faintly of gasoline.

"Yes," I admitted. "Hand me that whisk-broom, please. Everybody will be wearing new clothes but us to-day, and we haven't got any. Do you care?"

"I should think myself pretty mean if I did," returned Ernie, roundly. "Come on, Elizabeth. The bells are ringing. We have barely time to say good-bye to Bobs."

The nursery windows were open. The sunshine fell in bright patches across Robin's little white crib, where he lay among his pillows, literally embowered amid blossoming plants.

"See, Elizabeth," he called. "Here's another! —a crimson bramble rose. It hasn't any card, 'cept just a happy Easter one. Mother can't

guess who sent it, so I think *maybe* it was Mrs. Bo-gardus! That makes five flowers, and two rabbits, and three chickens, and a little red prayer-book, all for me! Here's a pansy for you and Ernie, please; 'cause you want to look pretty Easter day."

"Thank you, honey," we answered. And, though the stems were very short, we managed to pin Robin's pansies into our coats.

"They are playing 'Welcome, happy morning!'" said Ernestine, as the front door closed behind us, and the jubilant music of the chimes rang more clearly to our ears. "Oh, Elizabeth, we *are* happy, aren't we?"

"Indeed we are, Ernie dear," I returned. And then we had to hurry, since it was already late.

"See, there are Aunt Adelaide and Meta," I cried, presently, as we neared the church porch. "They are going in just ahead of us. How stunningly they are gotten up! Meta's suit is charming, and what a love of a hat!"

"But we look nice, too," returned Ernie, with an irrepressible little skip, and a downward glance at the bright flower in her button-hole. "We can't help it, Elizabeth,—because, we are *so glad!*"

The swelling notes of the organ, the youthful, soaring voices of the choristers, in exultant anthem and hymn, the collect, and short, strong sermon, seemed all a wonderful expression of our own inward thanksgiving and gratitude. Never before has an Easter service meant so much to me, and I know it was the same with Ernie.

Our shabby gloves met in sympathetic clasp. We squeezed one another's hands, and thought of that other morning when we sat side by side on the dark attic stairs, waiting for news of Robin. Oh, to have made up one's mind to renunciation, only to have one's treasure given back double-fold! For we have great hopes of Bobsie now; Dr. Porter is more than satisfied with the progress

he is making; and only listen,—there's more good news to tell!

For after service Aunt Adelaide and Meta waited for us in the church-porch, and we walked a couple of blocks together.

“Geof is very anxious to see you, Ernie,” said Aunt Adelaide. “Can you manage to get around for a little visit this afternoon? Dr. Porter has given his permission.”

“Oh!” cried Ernie, with an ecstatic little prance. “May I truly come? That's the one thing needed to make the day perfect!”

“Ask your mamma to come with you,” smiled Aunt Adelaide;—for the old breach seems really healed at last. Our mutual anxiety over Geof and Robin has brought us closer together than anything else could ever have done. “Tell her please that there is a little matter Uncle George and I want to talk over with her.”

“Yes; certainly I will,” returned Ernie; while

Meta asked, with a glance at the posy in my button-hole :

“Did Robin get many flowers for Easter?”

“Indeed he did,” I returned; “a pot of pansies, a lily, a purple hyacinth, and a beautiful crimson Rambler. It is one mass of bloom. It came just before church, and there was no card, so we have been guessing ever since.”

Meta nodded her head in a satisfied way. “He and Geof ought to have something pretty,” she said. “They have been sick so long, and it must be horrid to lie in bed with nothing but the wallpaper to look at. I think it’s rather nice to send Easter cards with Easter flowers, instead of your name, don’t you?”

Then we separated, and I thought no more of Meta’s remark; but this afternoon when Ernie stole on tiptoe into Geof’s room, the first thing she noticed, after the patient, of course, was a second crimson Rambler rose, the exact duplicate of Robin’s.

"Where did it come from, Geof?" asked Ernie, hoping to clear up the mystery of Bobsie's plant. "Was there any card?"

"Why, no," answered Geof. His poor hands were those of a skeleton; his voice was a whisper; his eyes seemed the only living thing left. When Ernie looked at him, she wanted to kiss him and cry;—but that would not have been cheering, so she asked about the crimson rambler, instead.

"It came this morning, just before church. Meta brought it up. There wasn't any visiting card, but there was this Easter affair with the moulting angel. I told Meta he'd make a big mistake if he tried to fly with *those* wings; and she didn't seem to like it much, though she said, 'I was undoubtedly an authority on the subject!' It's the first *natural* remark she's made to me since I've been sick," added Geof, with a weak little chuckle. "I,—I rather think I liked it."

"Well," says Ernie, in a burst of really unusual perspicacity, "I don't wonder Meta didn't enjoy

your criticism! I'm willing to bet my hat (it's the old one with the frozen pompon, you know) that she alone is responsible for the angel and the rose, too. Robin received duplicates this morning, just about the same time; only his angel has a drum instead of a trumpet, and from something Meta said to Elizabeth I am almost sure that she chose them!"

Geof's pale cheeks flushed and he lay quiet for a moment. "I never suspected it," he said, at last; "but I guess perhaps you're right. Certainly Meta has been treating me pretty white, lately, and the mater, too. I,—I wouldn't wonder a bit, Bunnie, if things were going to be different."

Meantime mother, Aunt Adelaide, and Uncle George were holding an equally interesting conversation in the library downstairs.

It seems that Dr. Porter wants Geof to go away for a couple of weeks; and he also remarked, in an apparently casual aside (though

we are tempted to suspect it was premeditated), that a change would be an excellent thing for Robin; but that he did not feel at liberty to prescribe it when he thought of the heavy expenses we had been under for the operation. The two remarks worked together in Aunt Adelaide's mind,—as perhaps they were intended to do,—and the result is that she has asked mother to take Geof and Robin, too, to Atlantic City for a fortnight, with Maria to help care for them, and Uncle George to foot the bills. And mother did not hesitate to accept, since Aunt Adelaide stated quite frankly that the obligation will be mutual. She does not want to leave the city just at present, and she quite shrinks from the responsibility of overseeing Geoffrey's convalescence. Could anything be more splendid!

Just think of our dear little Bobsie enjoying a holiday by the sea!—growing fat and rosy playing about on the beach, picking up clam-shells, and——

But that reminds me. I must interrupt my jubilations to tell of the sad end of Abraham Lincoln! Ernie and I have suspected for a couple of days past that all was not well in the little glass globe. Since Thursday, A. L. has refused to snatch at a straw, no matter how persistently he has been "tickled." Yesterday "he opened his mouth," as Bobsie explained, and he has not closed it since;—till, this afternoon, when I was talking to Robin about his little red prayer-book, —which I had just rescued from forming a tent for one of the white mice,—my olfactory organ began to misgive me.

"It isn't like your other books, Bobsie dear," I was explaining. "You must never use it to play with, or be careless of it. You may keep it under your pillow with your handkerchief, if you want; and when you are older and can understand better, you will find it full of the most comfortable words. Whatever your sorrow, you will always find something to help. But, bless

me! What a smell! Where *does* it come from?"

"Abraham Lincoln," answered Robin, in solemn accents.

"So it does!" I returned, sniffing suspiciously into the little globe. "This will never do, Bobs. He's stark dead, child! I must take it down and throw it into the back-yard."

"You *shan't*!" howled Bobsie, in a sudden outburst of uncontrollable woe. "I 'spected maybe he was sick; so I gave him some of my medicine and a teaspoonful of beef tea! You mustn't throw him into the back-yard, Elizabeth! He's been too *good*, I tell you!"

"But what is to be done about it then, dear?" I asked; for such violence of anguish was unusual on the part of Robin. "We can't keep him here any longer. You can see that for yourself."

"Then let's have a nice little funeral," sniffed Robin, pathetically. "We'll b-bury him beneath the crimson bramble rose, and you can read some

of the com-comfortable words out of my little red prayer-book."

"But, Bobsie," I remonstrated; "prayer-books weren't written about *clams*! I don't think there is anything here."

"You said I would always f-find something to c-comfort me," sobbed Bobsie. "And now, when I need it most,—you won't even look!"

What was to be done? Robin's faith was really touching. I could not bear to disappoint him, if it could be helped.

"Well, honey," I said, at last, "don't cry any more. We will bury Abraham Lincoln under the crimson bramble rose. Come,—you shall dig the grave with this silver teaspoon, and then if there is anything about clams in the prayer-book, I'll read it to you."

So Abraham Lincoln was neatly interred; and as Robin patted down the earth with the bowl of his silver spoon, I began in a grave voice from the Benedicite:

"O ye Whales, and all that move in the waters, bless ye the Lord : praise Him, and magnify Him for ever."

It was the best I could do, after a vain flutter of pages, and though a clam isn't exactly the same as a whale, Robin was more than satisfied.

"What did I tell you?" he asked. "I knew there'd be something if only you would look! And I s'pose Abraham Lincoln *moved*, Elizabeth, when he came from the fishman's at Christmas to this little globe."

Later, when I told Ernie of the tragedy, she took it almost as seriously as Robin. "Of course we had to expect that he would die sometime," she admitted, with a little sigh. "And I'm glad he waited till we had the crimson Rambler under which to bury him. It must have been a great comfort to Bobsie! Abraham Lincoln was always such a *tactful clam!*"

Saturday, April 18.

THE most wonderful thing has happened. I shall be able to fill the last two pages of my diary with such news,—and all because Ernie and I determined to clean house!

“It’s absurd to miss them so,” said Ernie, as she set Bobsie’s books straight in the nursery book-shelf yesterday afternoon. “But, somehow, I can’t get used to seeing this room so tidy!”

“And how queer it is not having any trays to carry,” I answered. “Mother and Bobs have never been away from us before. I wonder if there will be another letter this evening.”

“Mother writes such lovely letters, and Geof’s postscripts are so funny,” chuckled Ernie, with a slap at the front of her sailor blouse, where the last family epistle reposed. “Fancy Robin refusing clam-fritters, and telling the head waiter all about Abraham Lincoln in the hotel dining-room!”

“Well, I shall be glad when they are home

again," I admitted. "Perhaps that sounds selfish, since the change is doing them so much good; but I can't help feeling lonely when you are at school, dear."

"Elizabeth, don't you think it would be nice to have a little surprise for mother?" asked Ernestine. "Something useful that would save her work or trouble, after she comes back? I'll tell you what,—suppose we clean house! You, and Rose, and I could do it perfectly well; and this place hasn't had a good raking out in ages!"

"That's rather a sensible idea," I agreed; "especially now, when the family is so small. We could manage the attic, the basement, and the parlour floor, perhaps; but we mustn't disturb the boarders. Have you noticed, Ernie, that the Lysles have been receiving summer resort pamphlets in almost every mail this week? I am afraid it means they are planning to leave the city early,—and Miss Brown told me Monday that she had an invitation to spend July and August

with her nieces in the Adirondacks. I try not to worry; but we have drawn our last money from the bank, and, oh, I do dread the summer!"

"Don't think about it, then," returned Ernie, stoutly. "We've weathered a good many storms, honey, and it would be pretty ungrateful for us to fret *now*. Perhaps something will turn up at the last moment. I wish we were going to the country, too!" she added, with an inconsistent little sigh.

"Robin has never seen a clover field," I answered, "nor a live cow. And I haven't tasted buttermilk since I was seven years old. Just think, the woods are full of violets this very minute,—and thrushes, and bluebirds!"

"I know it," returned Ernie, glancing pensively out the window at the battered row of ash-cans that lined our dusty street. "I wish we could rent this old house," she added, vindictively, "and go away, and start a chicken farm! I'm tired of boarders, Elizabeth;—even when they are as kind

and considerate as Miss Brown and the Hippo family!"

"You can't be as tired of them as I am," I answered,—“because you don't have to order their meals! But we would need the front stoop browned over, and the cellar concreted, before we could dream of letting; and such things cost money. It just seems as if our hands were tied.”

“Which needn't prevent them from wielding a broom!” exclaimed Ernie, springing up with an energetic shake of her short skirts. “Come on, child,—I'm ashamed of us! A little hard work is the medicine we need. The idea of sitting here in opposite rocking-chairs, croakin' at one another like a pair of discontented grannies, when Robin and Geof are growing fat in Atlantic City, and mother is having a really truly holiday for the first time in years! *I'm* going up to begin on the attic this instant; and if we have to feel blue in June,—why, that's nearly two months off, yet.”

"But it's four o'clock, Ernie," I protested. "Don't you think we had better put off the house-cleaning till to-morrow?"

"No, I don't," returned Ernie, impetuously. "There is a pile of magazines in the workshop that hasn't been looked over since the year 1, Tecpatl! Mother told me weeks ago that she wanted them sent to the Philippines. She asked me to go through them then. So, come on."

"Very well," I answered, meekly. And a few moments later Ernie and I were seated on the workshop floor, each with our separate bunch of dusty literature.

"Here's that nice story about the rogue elephant," began Ernie, comfortably. "I don't think we can let that go. And, oh! here's the copy of *Scribbler's* with *The Magic Ring*. Do you remember, we read it aloud one Christmas? It is about the two little boys who went to the Circus."

"I thought," returned I, severely, "that we

came up here to get these magazines ready to send to the Philippines?"

"So we did," mumbled Ernie, "but if we don't go through them, how are we to know which ones we ought to send?"

At that moment I came upon an odd instalment of *The Refugees*, a thrilling historical romance that had haunted my memory for years. "Of course," I agreed, with suspicious alacrity; and after that we sat together on the workshop floor, and read and read; till the shadows began to steal out from the corners, the room grew dusk and gloomy, and I looked up with straining eyes to remark,—

"Ernestine, it is simply provoking! Why will editors always break off at the most exciting spot? The Indians are attacking the block-house, I can't find the next instalment, and——"

"*Whoop-ee!*" rang the shrill war-cry. "*Whoop! Whoop! hurrah! hur-roo-o!*"

For a moment I glared about me in terror.

Was I in the workshop or the Canadian backwoods? Was the wildly whirling figure that pranced and capered about me, now advancing, now retreating, my own little sister Ernie, or a bloodthirsty Iroquois savage?

"I've found it! I've found it!" shrilled the jubilant song. "After all my hunts, Elizabeth! In the cuckoo-clock, under Hazard's bed!—And to think we *nearly* sent it to Manila!"

"What are you talking about, Ernestine?" I demanded, severely. "No matter what you have found, you ought to be ashamed to shout so! You know that Miss Brown has a headache, and besides I quite mistook you for an Indian!"

Ernie dropped down beside me, and flung her arms about my neck. "Honey," she breathed,— "it's the *contract*,—the Dump-Cart Contract, at last! Stuck between the pages of an old copy of *Cayler's Engineering Magazine*! And to think, we almost sent it *to Manila*!"

So! I understood. The room began to swim



"I'VE FOUND IT! I'VE FOUND IT!"

about me. My head sank limply to Ernie's supporting shoulder.

"Don't you dare go and faint on me!" threatened that unsympathetic young person. "If you do, I'll spill water over your new rosebud stock. I mean it, Elizabeth!"

"You shan't!" I retorted; and sat up, clutching my precious embroidered collar with one hand, while I extended the other for the contract.

Ernie picked up the yellow-backed magazine, which she had dropped in the window when she began her wild war-dance, and extracted a legal-looking document.

"Here it is," she said; "and it was by the merest chance I found it. I knew there would be nothing in *Cayler's* to interest us, though some stray engineer in Manila might like it. And I was just about to put it with these other magazines we don't want,—when I noticed the date, and that made me think of dear father. So I opened it, just to see what he had been reading,

and the first thing I came on was the contract! Oh, Elizabeth, he must have slipped it in here on his way home from Mr. Perry's office that very afternoon! How natural it seems! And Rose cleared it away later, and we never suspected! *Well!*"

By this time Ernie and I were reading the document through, our heads close together in the window, our hearts thumping. Despite the legal verbiage which we did not altogether understand, despite the fast-fading light, there could be no doubt. The Dump-Cart Contract was found! It was also dated, witnessed, and signed, with a pathetic little blot of ink under the dear familiar G stem in father's name.

At first we could hardly believe our good fortune!

"Five per cent. of whatever profits the invention is making," gasped Ernie,—“and perhaps some back money, too! Oh, Elizabeth, the boarders can leave whenever they like, now! The

quicker the better—We can shut up this house, and go away to the country. Robin shall play in the clover fields, you shall drink buttermilk, and *I* will start a chicken farm! What a lovely surprise for mother!”

And she threw her arms about my neck, and for a while we wept and laughed together.

“And to think how ungrateful we were this very afternoon! It makes one rather ashamed, doesn’t it, dear?” I concluded, with a penitent sniff. “Haze and I will go and see Uncle George this evening. He will advise us.”

“About what?” asked Hazard’s voice, with a worried little accent, from the attic stairs. “Has anything happened? Is there bad news from mother?”

“No, indeed,” we answered. “Come in. Light the gas. We’ve something to show you.”

So Hazard came. Ernie struck a match, and again in the dear, familiar workshop, where so many important councils have been held, so many

family problems settled, we read the contract through together.

"Well," says Haze, with a little sigh. "So it is really found! What a scamp that Perry is! Yes, Elizabeth, you and I will see Uncle George this evening."

"I'm coming, too," piped Ernie. "I found it! I want to see what he will say!"

So after dinner,—where it was rather trying, I can tell you, to talk and eat as if nothing had happened because we did not think it wise for the boarders to suspect till things should be a little more definitely settled,—we slipped into our hats and jackets and hurried around to Uncle George's.

He sat at his desk in the library with a number of papers before him, and he looked up, rather surprised and displeased, as William ushered us into the room.

"Anything wrong at home?" he began. "You are not in trouble again, I hope, Hazard?"

"No, sir," says Haze, importantly. "Not this time, thanks." And he handed Uncle George the contract.

Well, you just ought to have seen Uncle George's face change as he read it.

"Where did this come from?" he asked, abruptly. "Who found it? when?"

"I did," piped Ernie; "this afternoon in an old copy of *Cayler's Engineering Magazine*. And, oh, Uncle George, it was the narrowest escape! We nearly sent it to Manila, to the sick soldiers!"

"H-m-m!" says Uncle George, surveying the signatures again. "You are to be congratulated, young lady." And then he added in a lower tone, as if to himself:—"I've done poor Dudley a great injustice. Apparently he wasn't altogether a fool." And, turning to Haze, he continued, "I'll keep this paper, my boy, and look out for your interests. Undoubtedly you have all been very badly treated. With the contract here to

prove it, we could prosecute Perry, and perhaps even land him behind the bars, but that would be a rather poor satisfaction, after all, and if you follow my advice you will use your power to settle things as expeditiously and as much to your advantage as possible."

"Oh, yes!" answered Ernie, Haze, and I, together. "We don't want to put anybody in jail. All we want is a little money."

"Well," returned Uncle George, "I'll do my best to get it for you." And then he took us into the drawing-room, and we related the story again to Meta and Aunt Adelaide, who listened with all their ears.

"How perfectly dandy!" cried Meta, clapping her hands when the last explanation had been made, and the last question answered. "Oh, I am so *glad*, and I guess you are, too, Elizabeth,—even if you didn't mind being poor!"

"Indeed I am," I agreed. "And I never said I didn't *mind*, Meta;—only that there were cer-

tain advantages which one had to experience to find out."

And then Aunt Adelaide rang the bell, and ordered seltzer lemonade and strawberry shortcake, and we feasted and planned. And later we came home and planned some more, after writing the good news to mother; till now it is nearly twelve o'clock, and I am sitting at my desk pouring out the wonderful story afresh, while Ernie lolls on the side of the bed, and maunders drowsily:—

"I think I'll try Cochin Chinas, unless they're the kind that wear ruffly pantalets. Did you ever hear of the lady that started with one egg, and ended with fifty thousand dollars? Oh, do come to bed, Elizabeth, or it will never be to-morrow morning. Our luck has changed!—and we want to wake up and find that we haven't dreamed it."

What Ernie says is true. Our luck has changed, indeed! And yet,—what is luck? I

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like to remember something the kind "Hippopotamus" said to mother one evening this winter when Robin was very sick, when Rose seemed extra-incompetent, when we were all feeling blue.

"Mrs. Graham," he remarked, "you're a lucky woman. I don't care how vexatious things may seem, I don't care how unfortunate:—with four such children as you have, there's bound to be luck in a house!"

Wasn't it pretty of him? And now that the Dump-Cart Contract is found, now that we are poor no longer, it will be good to remember that, for better or worse, we, ourselves, must always be the *real* luck of the Dudley Grahams.

THE END

